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Spartan Foreign Policy and Military Decline 404-371 BC

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Chapter 1

Sparta has always been a fascination to both modern and ancient scholars. The perceived uniqueness and militarism of Spartan society as compared to the rest of Greece has led many to uphold Sparta as an ideal. The idea of this noble Spartan society was debunked in the fourth century when Sparta obtained an empire, rose to the heights of power, and then fell dramatically.

In the years before the Peloponnesian War, Sparta had been the premier power in Greece. Spartan foreign policy was cautious: control the Peloponnese through a series of alliances that modern scholars refer to as the Peloponnesian League. Sparta was generally content to avoid any major involvement outside the Peloponnese. Within the Peloponnesian League, Sparta had shown throughout the fifth century a remarkable tolerance for democracy. Sparta's major concern in regard to the poleis of the Peloponnesian League was not how the Peloponnesians chose to govern themselves but that they would maintain a pro-Spartan foreign policy.

The Spartiates, the full citizen soldiers, served to implement Spartan policy. These men were unique in Greece in that they were full time soldiers prohibited from any other profession. As such, the Spartans had the greatest land army in Greece. Being essentially undefeated on the battlefield the Spartans had created a myth of invincibility that pervaded Greece. No army wished to stand against them.

The Spartan Army and state as a whole were faced with the problem of oliganthropia or population decline throughout the fifth century. Historians hotly debate the causes of this population decline. Hodkinson notes that there have been two major

approaches to this problem: the more rapid approach favored by himself, Figueira, and Birgalis and the gradual approach favored by Cartledge and M.H. Hansen

Cartledge argues that population decline was inevitable due to structural problems within Spartan society. He suggests that population decline occurred gradually both amongst the rich and poor. He writes that the poorest members of Spartan society could only afford to have one heir as they only the transmission of the entire *klaros* or land holding would enable their heir to pay the grain tax required for one to maintain Spartiate status.¹ The richer Spartiates too desired only one heir, as they were fearful the division of their large *klaroi* amongst several children would also result in a division of their family wealth. As it was illegal for Spartiates to engage in any profession besides soldiery or take up any economic activity, wealth was essentially fixed and unable to be obtained. Over the course of the fifth century, these Spartan practices lead to a decline in population.² M.H. Hansen also agrees that there were long standing practices in Sparta to concentrate wealth, though he concedes that the earthquake of 464 may have exacerbated this.³

The historians who favor the rapid approach, while acknowledging that there were structural problems within Spartan society such the pre existing class differences, cite the earthquake of 464 and following helot rebellion as the major cause of population decline. Hodkinson suggests that the earthquake and rebellion caused a major loss of life amongst the Spartiate class and forced them to reorganize the means by which was land was inherited. He argues that land inheritance, rather than being controlled by the state,

¹ Paul Cartledge. *Agesilaos and the Crisis of Sparta* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987) 168.

² Ibid.

³ Mogens Herman Hansen. Was Sparta a Normal or Exceptional Polis. *Sparta: Comparative Approaches* (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2009) 395.

became an individual matter. Spartans, unable to legally accrue coined money, became obsessed with increasing their wealth through strategic marriages, thus causing a concentration of land amongst a few rich families.⁴⁵

Birgalis too downplays the population decline before the earthquake arguing that the circumstances surrounding the great loss of life in the earthquake allowed the elites to take advantage and greatly increase their land holdings. He also cites that as this occurred, the elites became more and more obsessed with increasing their wealth and they passed legislation aimed at such.⁶ Figueira agrees with Birgalis and Hodkinson, though he cites the new laws of land transmission following the earthquake not as being an attempt by the wealthy to increase their power but as a legitimate attempt to maintain the Spartiate class and traditions that followed it such as the grain tax. He suggests that these laws created opportunity that the elites took advantage of to concentrate their wealth.⁷

Whatever the actual causes of oliganthropia, there was an absolute refusal in Sparta to acknowledge or correct the problem. We know that in 480 there were 8,000 full Spartiates. 50 years later there were at most 3,000.⁸ Sometime in the 420s Sparta integrated the Periokoi into the army. Though inferior to the Spartiates, the Perioikic

⁴ Stephen Hodkinson. Inheritance, Marriage and Demography: Perspectives Upon the Success and Decline of Classical Sparta. *Classical Sparta: Techniques Behind Her Success*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981) 105.

⁵ Stephen Hodkinson. *Property and Wealth in Classical Sparta* (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co. Ltd., 2000) 394.

⁶ Nikos Birgalias. Helotage and Spartan Social Organization. *Sparta Beyond the Mirage*. (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co. Ltd., 2002) 253.

⁷ Thomas J. Figueira. Iron Money and the Ideology of Consumption in Laconia. *Sparta Beyond the Mirage*. (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co. Ltd., 2002) 156.

⁸ Thomas J. Figueira. "Population Patterns in Late Archaic and Classical Sparta." *Transactions of the American Philological Association* Vol. 116, (1986) 212.

hoplites became after years of service, excellent soldiers. They were equal if not superior to any non-Spartan hoplites in Greece.

By the end of the Peloponnesian War the Spartiate class had probably dropped to around 2,500. In spite of this, Sparta was in 404, able to win the Peloponnesian War and affirm itself as hegemon. At the end of the Peloponnesian War, Sparta was in a position of power probably not seen before in Greece.

In spite of her great power, Sparta in 404, refused to recognize or correct the serious structural defects associated with oliganthropia. Against this background, the Spartans shockingly chose to embark on an imperialist policy unprecedented in its history. Lacking an ability to integrate foreign policy with military and economic reality, Sparta from 404 through 371 embarked on one misadventure after another, all the while alienating itself in the eyes of the Greek public opinion and suffering casualties of irreplaceable Spartiates.

In 371, years of poor policy finally caught up to the Spartans, as they were decisively defeated at the battle of Leuctra, putting a definitive end to even a localized hegemony. Even with oliganthropia it was Sparta's illogical and shortsighted policies, from 404-371, most notably the destruction of the Perioikic hoplite class that led to its collapse.

Chapter 2

In 404 BC, the Spartan Navarch, Lysander decisively defeated the last Athenian fleet at Aegospotami. Within six months, the Athenians, starving from a Spartan blockade, surrendered. Sparta in 404 BC had become unquestionably the most powerful poleis in the Greek World.

Due to his abilities, The Spartan authorities essentially gave Lysander free reign in making foreign policy during the last year of the Peloponnesian War.⁹ During his tenure as Navarch, Lysander established an excellent relationship with Cyrus, the prince of Persia. Cyrus gave Lysander total access to the almost unlimited funds of Persia. Lysander used this money not only to build the Spartan fleet but gave financial support to small oligarchic clubs in the Aegean cities of the Athenian Empire. With encouragement and financial support from Lysander, and no Athenian Fleet to oppose them, these men took control of the cities. The newly empowered oligarchs ruled as dekharchies, or narrow and brutal oligarchies under the control of ten men. These dekharchies owed their existence not to the Spartan authorities but to Lysander.

Lysander's dekharchies broke with the Spartan tradition of supporting broad oligarchic parties consisting of the traditional aristocracy. Many of the men of Lysander's dekharchies not only held extreme views but also were *novi homines*.¹⁰ They ruled in the fashion of *dunasteiai* or a collective tyranny above the law.¹¹ In Greece where tradition played a major role, the dekharchies were everything un-traditional.

⁹ Charles D. Hamilton, "Spartan Politics and Policy, 405-401 B. C." *The American Journal of Philology* Vol. 91, No. 3 (Jul., 1970) 295.

¹⁰ Cartledge. *Agesilaos* 94.

¹¹ Cartledge, *Agesilaos* 91.

The creation of the dekarchies was not the only cause of controversy in Sparta. There was great debate over what to do with the 500 talents of war booty Lysander sent back. In Sparta the open possession of precious metals were banned, though many individuals possessed huge quantities illegally. In spite of this, there was much opposition to having money in Sparta.

The debate over the war booty shows the factionalism that had emerged in Sparta. Traditionally there were two factions centered on the kings. Lysander and his supporters had by the end of the Peloponnesian War emerged as a third faction powerful enough to challenge the other two. The Lysandrians wished to radically alter Spartan society. Not only did they intend to allow the possession of money but even desired that Sparta mint her own coins.¹²

Lysander's view on money shows his understanding of foreign policy. Lysander had a grand strategy: he fully intended for Sparta to maintain her new Aegean empire. To do this required a fleet as well as money to hire mercenaries to quell local disturbances. In Greece, Navies were hugely expensive. It cost 1 talent a month just to pay the crew of 1 trireme. To put a sizable fleet of 100 triremes to sea would eat up the entirety of the war booty in less than a year and this does not include the costs for building and maintaining the fleet. Athens had covered these costs in two ways: tribute from her subject poleis, and a tax upon the wealthiest citizens. Undoubtedly, Lysander, by legalizing money, intended to do the same.

¹²Jacqueline Christien. Iron Money in Sparta: Myth and History. *Sparta Beyond the Mirage*. (London, Gerald Duckworth and Co. Ltd., 2002) 183.

Lysander's radical policies resulted in the other two factions led by the kings Agis and Pausanias forming a united front against him.¹³ The anti-Lysandrians had every reason to oppose Lysander; his radical policies on money and empire were a direct threat to their high positions. The kings and likely the aristocratic men who formed their respective factions were hugely rich despite the prohibition on private possession of money. These men had managed to accumulate tremendous wealth both in the possession of vast estates and in secret hordes of coined money. They had become fabulously wealthy largely at the expense of the other Spartiates. By denying the other Spartiates the opportunity to obtain or possess money they prevented social mobility.

In Sparta, full citizenship was limited to those who possessed enough land to give a set portion of their crops to the *enomotiai* or common messes. This system of flat tax heavily favored the rich. Many poor Spartiates either became heavily indebted to the rich or fell out of the citizen class entirely. The economic situation as well as a major earthquake in 464 led to the shrinkage of the Spartiate class. As poorer Spartiates were squeezed out of the class, the wealthy Spartiates increased their power. If they were allowed legally to obtain and possess money, the poor Spartiates could have had an avenue for social mobility and break the political dominance of the rich. Through Lysander, the poorer Spartiates had an opportunity to obtain wealth. Lysander was notorious for rewarding financially his supporters be they rich or poor.¹⁴

The power and wealth, Lysander had accumulated was enough for him to force through a compromise on the issue of money: private possession of money would remain

¹³ Hamilton "Spartan Politics" 392.

¹⁴ Plutarch. *Life of Lysander*, trans. Aubrey Stewart and George Long. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1899) 16.

illegal but the money could be used for “public purposes.”¹⁵ Further Lysander was able to force through a resolution whereby the Spartans would collect tribute from the former Athenian subject poleis. This tribute exceeded 1,000 talents per year.¹⁶ It is likely that Lysander bribed the notoriously corrupt ephors into passing the decree.¹⁷

The other source of controversy at Sparta was the question as to how to handle the defeated Athenians. The Thebans and Corinthians, Sparta’s most powerful allies during the Peloponnesian War demanded that Sparta destroy Athens and sell the population into slavery. The Spartans however refused. Their official reason according to Xenophon was that they could not destroy Athens due to the outstanding service she rendered against Persia.¹⁸ While Sparta likely did legitimately feel some nostalgic gratitude towards the Athenians, it is far more probable that practical considerations both foreign and domestic played a far greater role in the Spartan decision.

Powell argues that had Sparta destroyed Athens, Lysander would benefit the most. He could have taken such a great quantity of booty that he would essentially be able to bribe his way into the kingship of Sparta herself.¹⁹ This is consistent with the clearly anti-Lysandrian sentiment at Sparta. Hamilton agrees that there was great factionalism but does not tie the desire to destroy Athens with any particular faction. In fact, it is uncertain if Lysander favored destruction.²⁰ Had he desired to, the ancient sources certainly would have mentioned it.

¹⁵ Plutarch, Lysander 17.

¹⁶ Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History Volume II*, trans C.H. Oldfather. (Harvard University Press, 1966-67) 14.10.2.

¹⁷ Anton Powell. Why did Sparta not destroy Athens in 404 or 403 BC. *Sparta and War* (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2006) 299.

¹⁸ Xenophon. *A History of My Times*, trans. Rex Warner. (London: Penguin 1979) 2.2.7.

¹⁹ Powell, *Sparta*, 299.

²⁰ Hamilton, “Spartan Politics” 308.

All factions certainly had geopolitical concerns about destroying Athens. A destroyed Athens would open up a major power vacuum in Central Greece. Corinth and Thebes would almost certainly step into. Though they had both been Spartan allies during the Peloponnesian War, they were upset with Sparta due to her refusal to share any of the war booty or allow their input at the peace negotiations. Prior to 404, Athens served as the greatest check on Theban and Corinthian power. Without Athens, Corinth would be able to assume absolute control over the isthmus, the entranceway to the Peloponnese. Thebes might be able to become hegemon in central Greece. Both of these scenarios though very much hypothetical were not acceptable to Sparta. The Lysandrians and the traditionalists had to be aware of the negative geopolitical implications of a destroyed Athens. The increased power of Thebes and Corinth would threaten the agendas of the traditionalists and the Lysandrians.

Lysander as the man who had defeated the Athenian fleet was able to play a major role in the peace. As he had done in the other Aegean poleis, Lysander set up a narrow oligarchy in Athens. This oligarchy was known as the thirty tyrants. The thirty quickly began to rid themselves of any opposition, either real or perceived. Executions became a daily occurrence and many fled Athens.²¹ Diodorus states that the Spartans forbid any other Greek state from taking in the exiles.²² It is quite possible that the anti-exile decree came from Lysander who was so powerful he could essentially force through almost any decree at Sparta. A decree such as refusing the exiles is surprising to have come from the traditionalist kings, as defeated enemies were almost always allowed to go into exile. Only the thirty and Lysander stood to benefit from such a decree. The sheer numbers of

²¹ Xenophon 2.3.4.

²² Diodorus 14.6.1.

exiles were a threat to the power of the thirty. If the thirty were to fall, it would be a great blow against Lysander.

Many of the other Greek Poleis, most notably Thebes were distraught at the reign of terror taking place at Athens. Already greatly dissatisfied with the conduct of the Spartans, they ignored the decree and welcomed in the Athenian exiles.²³ The exiles led by Thrasybulus fully intended to take back their city.

Thrasybulus set out from Thebes with just 70 men and took the border fort at Phyle.²⁴ Hearing of his success, many Athenian exiles flocked to Phyle and Thrasybulus' forces grew to 700.²⁵ The thirty quickly responded by attacking Phyle. In their efforts to assert control of Athens had excluded all but the 3,000 of the richest citizens from bearing arms.²⁶ Of these 3,000, there were very few who were willing to fight against their fellow Athenians in supported of the thirty.²⁷ The most reliable troops the thirty had at their disposal were the Spartan garrison troops, who were certainly not Spartiate. They were likely a combination of Neodamodeis, Peloponnesians, and mercenaries.

Rather than wait for the thirty to besiege Phyle, Thrasybulus ordered his men to attack the enemy camp at night and in the middle of a snowstorm. Thrasybulus' men surprised the forces of the thirty who were totally unprepared to fight given the conditions.²⁸ The attack quickly turned into a rout as the disorganized forces of the thirty fled from the exiles who, killed 120 men and drove the rest back to the city.²⁹ After Phyle it was clear that the exiles would be a serious challenge for the thirty.

²³ Diodorus 14.6.1.

²⁴ Xenophon 2.4.3.

²⁵ *ibid*

²⁶ Xenophon 2.4.1.

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ Xenophon 2.4.3.

²⁹ Xenophon 2.4.3.

Thrasybulus, whose force now grew to over 1,000 men, marched on Piraeus and encamped at a hill called Munychia.^{30 31} The disorganized and demoralized troops of the thirty foolishly attacked the superior position of the exiles. In the ensuing battle the exiles routed the forces of the thirty, took Piraeus, and killed many of the thirty including their leader, Critias.³²

In the aftermath of Munychia, the thirty appealed to their patron Lysander for assistance. Lysander seemingly acted independent of Sparta, blockaded the Piraeus and led troops to Athens in support of his partisans. In Sparta the ephors sent out Pausanias at the head of an expedition theoretically in support of the thirty.³³

Modern historians Charles Hamilton and Anton Powell agree that the purpose of Pausanias troops was to preempt Lysander.³⁴³⁵ Yet why would the ephors, some of whom were in the pay of Lysander, allow this? It is probable that Pausanias had everyone convinced except for a few close friends that he was going to support Lysander when really he intended all along to preempt him. The Thebans and Corinthians were some of those who were convinced Pausanias' mission was to assist Lysander and annex Athens and so refused to join the expedition.³⁶

Pausanias arrived with the Spartan troops as Lysander was preparing a siege. By law, Pausanias as king held absolute command outside of Sparta. Lysander had no choice to obey lest he commit treason. Soon after Pausanias' arrival, some light troops from the Piraeus came out to harry Pausanias' lines. Pausanias responded by attacking with his

³⁰ Xenophon 2.4.5.

³¹ Diodorus 14.33.1.

³² Xenophon 2.4.9.

³³ Xenophon 2.4.13.

³⁴ Hamilton, "Spartan Politics" 312.

³⁵ Powell, Sparta, 300.

³⁶ Xenophon 2.4.13.

cavalry and some Spartiates. The Spartans drove back the Athenian troops but during the pursuit ran into the main body of Thrasybulus' force, gathering at the urban center of Piraeus. In the urban fighting that followed, the Athenians drove the Spartans back with many casualties including two polemarchs. Pausanias withdrew, reformed his troops, and marched back against the Athenians. Thrasybulus prepared his troops to face the Spartan phalanx head on. The two phalanxes clashed and slowly the Spartans obtained the upper hand and drove the Athenians back to the Piraeus.³⁷ Sparta had won a minor tactical victory, as Thrasybulus' force remained intact.

Winning the battle enabled Pausanias to offer peace terms to the exiles as a victor. He sent word to the men at Piraeus telling them of his intention to restore the democracy and how they should go about offering peace terms to the ephors who were along with Pausanias on the campaign. Not coincidentally the ephors who were on the campaign were supporters of Pausanias' foreign policy. Through the efforts of Pausanias the exiles proposed terms whereby they promised to remain friendly towards Sparta and agreed to a general amnesty. Every faction in Athens would have a say in the government except the remnants of the thirty who were allowed to go into exile at Eleusis. In doing this, Pausanias laid the groundwork for the Athenians to reestablish their democratic constitution as the more numerous democrats easily and quickly pushed aside the oligarchic faction.³⁸

Diodorus suggests Pausanias' actions had the purpose of preventing Lysander from obtaining more power.³⁹ While this may explain the reasons for the expedition to Athens, it does not explain Pausanias' actions after he defeated the exiles. Pausanias

³⁷ Xenophon 2.4.18.

³⁸ Xenophon 2.4.20.

³⁹ Diodorus 14.33.1.

could have easily supported a moderate pro Spartan oligarchy coming to power in Athens but chose not to. This begs the question as to why he allowed the democracy to return to Athens.

Powell argues that the anti-Lysandrian faction had the singular objective of opposing Lysander. He suggests that supporting democracy in Athens was a means of opposition to Lysander's policies, as democracy was the extreme opposite of dekharchy.⁴⁰ The anti-Lysandrians were almost certainly behind the ephoral decree ending support for the dekharchies. Xenophon states that by 396, the "dekharchies originally set up by himself (Lysander) in the different cities (of the Aegean and Asia Minor), but at a later date were expelled through the action of the ephors who issued a fiat reestablishing the old order."⁴¹ Xenophon gives no specific date for this decree, though it certainly seems probable that this occurred in the immediate aftermath of the collapse of the thirty at Athens. When that regime was overthrown, Lysander's policies of dekharchy had probably sustained a major set back. In this circumstance, the ephors under the increased influence of the traditionalists would have abandoned the dekharchies in the period immediately following the restoration of democracy at Athens.

Hamilton suggests that the two kings' factions had very different foreign policy agendas. Pausanias favored a total disengagement while Agis wished to maintain the Spartan empire but only through domination of mainland Greece.⁴² Both kings were not only unified in their desire to drive out Lysander but also, neither of their foreign policies involved control of Athens, or the Aegean. As a result, they may have seen no harm in a restored democracy at Athens. The restoration of democracy at Athens was a short-term

⁴⁰ Powell Sparta, 300.

⁴¹ Xenophon 3.4.2.

⁴² Hamilton, "Spartan Politics" 308.

policy success only in the sense that the kings were able to suspend for the moment Lysandrian imperialism.

Long-term, the policy towards democracy in Athens, the decree against money, and the cessation of support for the dekharchies served mainly to prevent Lysander increasing power. Pausanias held the opinion that democracies could coexist with Sparta. While this may have been true for medium powers such as the Peloponnesian poleis of Mantinea and Elis, Athens was a great power with a long expansionist history. Further Athens had been fighting Sparta for the past 30 years and during that time had undoubtedly built up significant anti-Spartan sentiment that was only enhanced by the installation of the thirty. There was no reason to believe that the Athenians would suddenly cease their expansionist ideals and adopt a pro Spartan foreign policy. The Athenians under a democratic government were certain to try to regain their empire, the lifeblood of the democracy.

It is clear that at Sparta, there were two routes of foreign policy being enacted simultaneously. Lysander's interventionist foreign policy was in fact sustainable, had he encountered less opposition from the traditional elites. The dekharchies provided the tribute necessary for him to recruit mercenaries, maintain a fleet, and so establish a Spartan Empire in the Aegean.

The traditionalists were clearly against empire and the ephorai decree against the dekharchies proves they had no intention of sustaining empire in the Aegean. As long as Sparta had no intention to embark on major foreign policy adventures outside the Peloponnese, the traditionalist policy found success. Yet should Sparta desire empire, she could do so only with the tribute from the Aegean. Had Sparta continued either the

traditionalist policies or those of Lysander she probably could have sustained her position as a leading Greek polis.

Chapter 3

During the last year of the Peloponnesian War, Lysander (and Sparta by extension) and Cyrus had established an extremely close relationship. It was this relationship that enabled Sparta to defeat the Athenians. When Cyrus began to recruit mercenaries from Greece for an attempt to overthrow his brother Artaxerxes II, Sparta not only assisted in their recruitment but also provided 700 Peloponnesian mercenaries for service with Cyrus.⁴³ Throughout the expedition, the 10,000 were “usually under the command of a Spartan.”⁴⁴

In 401, the expedition of the 10,000 faced the numerically superior Persian at the battle of Cunaxa. The Greeks fought the numerically superior Persians to a standstill but Cyrus was killed.⁴⁵ Tissaphernes, a loyal follower of Artaxerxes and Satrap of Caria, tricked the rest of the Greek leadership into coming to a feast unarmed where they were killed as well.⁴⁶ Undaunted the Greeks elected new generals (including Xenophon) and fought their way out of Persia. Artaxerxes was now undisputed ruler of Persia. He undoubtedly did not hold the Spartans in high regard. Additionally, the Spartans, without Cyrus, were cut off from their greatest (and only) financial benefactor.

With Cyrus’ death at Cunaxa, the Ionian Cities were without their lenient ruler. Artaxerxes gave Tissaphernes command of Lydia and Caria, the former being a province of Cyrus. Tissaphernes either as a way to show his power or as revenge for supporting

⁴³ Ellen Millender. *The Politics of Spartan Mercenary Service. Sparta and War.* (Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2006) 240.

⁴⁴ Millender, *Spartan Mercenary*, 241.

⁴⁵ Diodorus 14.24.6

⁴⁶ Diodorus 14.26.6.

Cyrus demanded the Ionian poleis submit to him.⁴⁷ In response, the Ionian cities appealed to Sparta for assistance.

The manner in which the Ionian cities appealed for aid confirms two facts: Lysander's garrisons and dekarchies had been withdrawn by this date and Lysander himself was somewhat sidelined from Spartan policy making. None of the ancient sources make any mention of Lysander or his partisans in connection to the Spartan decision to aid the Ionian cities. If the dekarchies were still in power in 400, surely we would hear of a direct appeal to Lysander.

Unfortunately there is a lack of evidence for the relationship between the Ionian Cities and Sparta. Hamilton suggests that the Ionian cities were surrendered to Persia in 404 as part of Sparta's treaty obligations.⁴⁸ Yet we know that in 404, Lysander, in addition to being powerful in Sparta was also a temporary satrap of Cyrus.⁴⁹ Cyrus, who was satrap of Caria and Lydia probably entrusted the Ionian cities to Lysander even after the official transfer of their sovereignty to Persia, thereby creating a situation of *de facto* Spartan rule but *de jure* Persian rule. In 401, the fact that the Ionian cities had to make a concerted appeal to Sparta for aid proves they were no longer in any type of alliance, tributary, or client relationship with Sparta.

Cyrus, who was engaged in building an army to overthrow his brother, seemed to have no issue with the restoration of the popular parties. He likely viewed this action as a Spartan matter. With the Spartans withdrawal from Ionia and Cyrus' distracted with his

⁴⁷ Xenophon 3.1.4.

⁴⁸ Charles D. Hamilton, *Agésilas and the Failure of the Spartan Hegemony*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) 88.

⁴⁹ Plutarch, Lysander 9.

coup attempt, the Ionian cities were not only autonomous but also essentially independent. Such was the situation when the Ionians appealed for aid.

The Spartans seemingly without any debate prepared to aid the Ionians. Such a military action was totally out of character for the Spartans. Previously, the issue of aiding the Ionians against Persia was entirely an Athenian matter. It was the Athenians who shared a common history with the Ionians as well as the naval and financial means to aid them.

The Athenian success in liberating the poleis of Asia Minor from Persia in the previous century was the result of a sustained campaign of naval and expeditionary warfare. The Athenians had a history of this type of expeditionary warfare. They maintained large and effective fleets. Due to their superior seamanship they were able to continuously defeat the Persian fleets sent against them. The Athenians were able to threaten Persia from Ionia to Cyprus to Egypt before both sides finally agreed on a peace treaty whereby the Ionians officially became independent.

In 400, Sparta did not have nearly the resources the Athenians had more than half a century earlier. Sparta lacked the money necessary for building and maintaining multiple fleets. Without a great naval tradition, she had besides Lysander, few if any capable admirals or a large pool of men with rowing experience. It was under these circumstances that Sparta went to war with Persia, a power with unlimited financial resources and the ability to put multiple fleets to sea. Sparta also faced the danger of great hostility from the other Greek Poleis.

In addition to lacking the resources for a sustained campaign, there is also the question as to where the Spartan political will came from. Pausanias and Agis had in 403

successfully trumped Lysander's imperialist policies in favor of traditional Spartan policy: asserting control over the Peloponnese. In 400, however Agis had died. Due to Lysander's influence, Agis was replaced not by his son Leotychidas but Ages' half brother Agesilaus.⁵⁰⁵¹ Agesilaus was also not coincidentally a former eromenos of Lysander.⁵²

In addition to the internal events taking place in Sparta, there was also the odd Spartan-Persian relation to take into account. Hamilton argues that Sparta and Persia were essentially at war due to Sparta's assistance in Cyrus' coup attempt.⁵³ Assisting Cyrus, a Xenia of Lysander however, would unequivocally be at odds with the anti-Lysandrian policies of the two kings. It is likely that the ephorial decision to aid Cyrus took place prior to Pausanias' expedition to Athens and before Lysander was sidelined.⁵⁴ Essentially, the events were already in motion when the kings retook control of foreign policy. Although Lysander had lost prestige due to the events at Athens in 403, his influence was by no means eliminated. It is likely that Lysander, who disappears from the record between 403 and 400, used his influence to assist Cyrus in recruiting mercenaries. Undoubtedly, the Kings were aware of this and had no issue with it. As long as Lysander was involved in his own adventures, he was not a threat to the traditional power at Sparta.

Hamilton argues that the Ionian invasion was a way of restoring Greek public opinion.⁵⁵ He suggests that Pausanias was especially concerned with the Spartan reputation abroad. Westlake too agrees that public opinion drove the expedition. He notes

⁵⁰ Xenophon 3.3.1.

⁵¹ Plutarch Lysander 22

⁵² Paul Cartledge *Spartan Reflections*. (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) 103.

⁵³ Hamilton Agesilaus 89.

⁵⁴ Xenophon 3.1.1.

⁵⁵ Hamilton, Agesilaus 89.

as well that Sparta acted unusually with unusual haste in dispatching their forces, choosing not even to wait for the next campaigning season.⁵⁶ Cartledge also cites public opinion as a factor in the expedition, but he does not consider it to be the only cause.⁵⁷ He suggests that Sparta in claiming to be “champion of Hellas” unwittingly created for herself the obligation of protecting all Greeks, including the Ionians.⁵⁸ Perhaps Pausanias, in addition to holding Greek public opinion in high regard, also felt a moral obligation: Sparta was the only polis in a position to aid fellow Greeks and had a duty to do so.

While public opinion of Sparta was certainly low, and Pausanias may have indeed considered morality, it still does not entirely explain the abrupt change in policy. We must look to the internal political situation at Sparta. The new king, Agesilaus almost certainly felt indebted to Lysander. After all, it was through Lysander’s influence that he was able to ascend to the Eurypontid throne. We know that Lysander had since 403, designs on reclaiming his Aegean empire.⁵⁹ An expedition to Asia would give him the perfect opportunity. A look at the composition of the force that went to Asia Minor bears the mark of Lysander’s influence: that is various non-Spartan contingents, neodamodeis, mercenaries, and Peloponnesians. Previously, the Spartans had used these forces to great effect under Brasidas who was a follower of Lysander. In 400, Sparta sent 1,000

⁵⁶ H. D. Westlake. Spartan Intervention in Asia, 400-397 B.C. *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* Vol. 35, No. 4 (4th Qtr., 1986), 408.

⁵⁷ Cartledge, Agesilaus 191.

⁵⁸ *ibid*

⁵⁹ Plutarch, Lysander 22.

neodamodeis and 4,000-6,000 Peloponnesians.⁶⁰⁶¹ The Athenians contributed 300 cavalry, most of whom had served with the thirty.⁶²

Westlake suggests that Pausanias' concerns for public opinion, Lysander's desire to reclaim his empire, and an overall confidence the Spartans felt in themselves caused the expedition to be sent out.⁶³ The two major power blocks at Sparta, Lysander and Pausanias surprisingly agreed on foreign policy, though they had vastly different motives. This agreement may explain the haste with which the expedition was dispatched.

We know of Lysander's motives for the expedition. Pausanias for his part may have legitimately been concerned with the anti-Spartan feelings present in Greece and saw a low risk-high reward opportunity. Fighting and defeating Persia for the sake of the Ionians could certainly result in an upsurge of enthusiasm for Sparta. Cartledge notes that for the Greeks, "debunking Persia was a favorite Panhellenic pastime."⁶⁴ If the expedition failed, the overall strategic situation would likely not change for Sparta. She might lose influence in the Aegean, though Pausanias had already abandoned the idea of an Aegean Empire. Spartan policy in 400 was clear: control the Peloponnese, and generally avoid involvement in internal affairs of other Poleis.

The expedition set out in 400 with under the command of Thibron.⁶⁵ After some early successes Thibron failed to capture the city of Larisa and was replaced by Dercylidas.⁶⁶ Dercylidas choice as commander shows the influence the Lysandrians had

⁶⁰ Xenophon 3.1.6.

⁶¹ Diodorus 14.36.1.

⁶² Xenophon 3.1.5.

⁶³ Westlake, "Spartan Intervention" 409.

⁶⁴ Cartledge, Agesilaus 185.

⁶⁵ Diodorus 14.36.1.

⁶⁶ Xenophon 3.1.12.

on the campaign. Dercylidas was unquestionably a member of the Lysandrian faction having previously served under Lysander as governor of Abydos.⁶⁷

Dercylidas was fully aware of the strategic limitations of his 7,000-man army. Westlake notes that the expedition faced numerous problems. He argues that short of an immediate and crushing victory, against Tissaphernes, Dercylidas only recourse was to garrison the cities, something that he had neither the manpower nor money to do.⁶⁸ He quickly came to a truce with Tissaphernes and focused his forces against the Phrygian satrap Pharnabazus, whose province included the Ionian Cities of the Aeolid. Westlake suggests that Dercylidas attacked Pharnabazus because he was a “soft” target, much weaker than the powerful Tissaphernes.⁶⁹ Indeed, the 7,000-man Greek Army was probably inferior to the troops Cyrus had with him. Though campaigning against Persia was popular, we cannot be sure that the Peloponnesian allies were especially thrilled with the expeditionary nature of the campaign. It was quite uncertain if or when they would be able to return home. Cyrus’ mercenaries had at least some knowledge that they could be away from home for a while and further had the promise of pay to motivate them.

Upon arrival in Phrygia, Pharnabazus’ satrapy, Dercylidas immediately sent messengers to the cities promising full independence should they join him. Many cities both Greek and non-Greek responded to Dercylidas and sent contingents to join his force.⁷⁰ Xenophon writes that in eight days, nine cities joined Dercylidas.⁷¹ Pharnabazus did not have the resources to deal with the defecting cities and Dercylidas’ force. Fearing Dercylidas might expand his campaign and threaten the heartland of Phrygia;

⁶⁷ Xenophon 3.1.13.

⁶⁸ Westlake, “Spartan intervention” 409.

⁶⁹ Westlake, “Spartan intervention” 414.

⁷⁰ Xenophon 3.1.12.

⁷¹ Xenophon 3.2.1.

Pharnabazus readily accepted a truce whereby he essentially granted independence to the cities of the Aeolid.⁷² In exchange, Dercylidas ceased plundering Phrygia and moved into Bithynia.⁷³

The campaign against Persia was unusual in the level in which it was scrutinized by the ephors. We hear from Xenophon of a fact-finding mission in 398 at the end of Dercylidas' first year of command. Perhaps the high level of scrutiny came from the anti-imperialist faction at Sparta. They intended to make sure Dercylidas was not acting in the manner of Lysander and setting up his partisans in the Ionian Cities which he captured. Approving of the situation, the ephors extended Dercylidas command for another year.

In 397, Dercylidas' second year of command, he renewed the truce with Pharnabazus and continued to campaign in Bithynia and Thrace. At some point during the year the war expanded into Tissaphernes province of Caria. Diodorus and Xenophon provide different reasons for this. Xenophon argues that ambassadors from the Ionian cities under the control of Tissaphernes came to Sparta and exhorted the ephors to expand the war into Caria. The ephors responded and ordered Dercylidas to expand his campaign. Once this occurred, Pharnabazus and Tissaphernes reacted by joining forces and obtaining money from Artaxerxes to build a fleet.⁷⁴

Diodorus however suggests that this was the Spartans reacting to the Persians. He writes that Pharnabazus went to Artaxerxes with his plan to build a fleet and place Conon, the exiled Athenian admiral at its head. At the same time, Pharnabazus and

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Xenophon 3.2.10.

Tissaphernes joined forces and marched against Ephesus.⁷⁵ Diodorus' history may be more reliable particularly due to his mention of Ephesus. That city, we know from Xenophon was de facto independent of Persia in 397. Thibron had taken the city before Dercylidas replaced him and the Ephesus was also one of the cities the ephors visited on their fact-finding mission in 398.

Xenophon's suggests that the Persians only reacted when Sparta expanded the war into Tissaphernes' province. It is doubtful that the Persians essentially disregarded the Spartans in Asia Minor. It is far more probable that as soon as Sparta landed troops on the Ionian coast in 400, the Persians fully intended to expel them. The recent coup attempt may have left Persia in disarray and it took time before she was ready to mount a major campaign against Sparta. The truces Pharnabazus made with Dercylidas were likely strategic in that it bought the Persians time to build an army and navy to expel the Spartans. Probably the ephorial decision to expand the war came in order to protect Ephesus from a Persian Army.

At sea as well, there is support for Diodorus' account that the Persians acted first. Diodorus writes that in 398, Conon, upon taking leadership of the fleet immediately sailed with the forty triremes that were completed to Cilicia for the purpose of "making war preparations."⁷⁶ Xenophon too tells of naval action. He suggests that the Spartan navy, which previously had not been a part of the campaign, was suddenly called into action.⁷⁷ The Spartans already controlled the Aegean and therefore had no reason to activate the navy unless they felt threatened. Conon's fleet was almost certainly the

⁷⁵ Diodorus 14.39.4.

⁷⁶ Diodorus 14.39.4.

⁷⁷ Xenophon 3.2.10.

catalyst for the Spartan action. As was traditional Persian practice, the action to expel the Spartans from Asia Minor was a combined land and sea campaign.

Hamilton argues that the ambassadors from Ionia essentially forced Sparta to expand the war.⁷⁸ Westlake agrees, and adds that the Persian naval program was unknown to the ambassadors.⁷⁹ It is possible that Persia and Sparta were acting somewhat simultaneously. Even if the ambassadors were unaware of the naval program, the Spartan authorities were. The Spartans may have been debating as how to proceed when the ambassadors arrived. Their pleas along with the Persian preparations might have spurred the Spartans into action.

In 397, the forces of Dercylidas met the combined force of Tissaphernes and Pharnabazus. The Persians had 20,000 infantry and 10,000 cavalry against 7,000 Greeks.⁸⁰ Instead of attacking immediately, the Persians agreed to another truce. Both sides had reason to avoid a fight. Tissaphernes, according to Xenophon had encountered such trouble fighting the Greek army of Cyrus that he was apprehensive about fighting hoplites.⁸¹ Dercylidas was so heavily outnumbered especially in cavalry that he almost certainly wished to avoid a fight and wait for reinforcements. He also was likely aware that engaging in a great battle would turn the war into a major strategic contest that he did not have the resources for.

At this moment, Lysander returned in full force to the foreign policy making scene. He was clearly aware of the direness of the situation. Though Xenophon states that Lysander was “convinced of the superiority of the Hellenic Navy” he is likely referring to

⁷⁸ Hamilton, Agesilaus 90.

⁷⁹ Westlake, “Spartan Intervention” 421.

⁸⁰ Diodorus 14.39.5.

⁸¹ Xenophon 3.2.12.

Lysander's feelings about the present situation, whereby the navy was superior to the Persians.⁸² Lysander was one of the few Spartans who had extensive naval experience and knew of the costs associated with naval warfare. He certainly was aware that Sparta could not maintain a long naval war with Persia.

Lysander's next move confirms his understanding of the strategic situation. He convinced Agesilaus to lead a second expedition to Asia Minor. Lysander probably hoped that one major naval victory (probably all Sparta could hope for) before the entire Persian fleet was ready, combined with a second expedition to Asia Minor, might be enough to obtain at least a somewhat favorable peace with Persia. Xenophon also reports a personal objective for Lysander: restoration of the dekharchies.⁸³

That Lysander was able to convince Agesilaus shows not only the prowess of the former in foreign affairs but also the naivety of the latter. Agesilaus did nothing to prepare for the campaign. Lysander even prepared the specific numbers and types of troops.

Agesilaus was unlike most Spartan kings. Not being an heir to the throne, he had gone through the Agoge. By going through this, Agesilaus was taught obedience from a young age. Like most Spartans, he was unaccustomed to creativity or flexibility. He knew only to obey. Agesilaus also ascended to the kingship at the age of about 40. As a result, he had for his entire life known only of obedience. This unusual background for a Spartan king would have great effects on his decision-making.

⁸² Xenophon 3.2.12.

⁸³ Xenophon 3.4.2.

Agesilaus' took with him to Asia Minor 6,000 Peloponnesians, 2,000 Neodamodeis and 30 Spartiates who would act as his officer staff.⁸⁴ This brought the total Hellenic force in Persia to over 15,000 when taking into account the local Asiatic contingents as well as remnants of the 10,000 who joined the Greek force after their journey out of Persia.

En route to Asia, Agesilaus became embroiled in a major diplomatic crisis. At Aulis, a territory of the Theban led Boeotian Federation, Agesilaus attempted to make a sacrifice in the manner of Agamemnon. The local Boeotian Priest however warned that sacrificing at Aulis was against custom. Agesilaus proceeded anyway. In response the Boeotians sent Cavalry who broke up the sacrifice and destroyed the altar.⁸⁵ There was nothing Agesilaus could do. This event not only caused a major rift in the already tense relations between the Spartans and Thebans but also led to a lifelong hatred of Agesilaus towards Thebes.

Agesilaus arrived in Ionia in 496. Seeing that many local leaders responded to Lysander rather than himself, he sent Lysander away to ravage the Hellespont fearing he would try to overtake the king. Then Tissaphernes came to Agesilaus and asked why he was in Ionia. Agesilaus responded that he was there for the purpose of obtaining the freedom of the Ionian Cities. Tissaphernes then offered to convey this message to the king as long as Agesilaus agreed to a truce while Tissaphernes conveyed Agesilaus' message to the king. Even Xenophon begrudgingly acknowledges the stupidity of Agesilaus in accepting the truce as Tissaphernes immediately broke the pact and prepared

⁸⁴ Xenophon 3.4.2.

⁸⁵ Xenophon 3.4.3.

an army.⁸⁶ Xenophon writes that even though Agesilaus knew of Tissaphernes breaking the truce, he refused to break it himself. This rigidity and inflexibility, which may be related back to Agesilaus' upbringing, would often plague his decision making.

Making a truce with Tissaphernes was the exact opposite of Agesilaus' mission. The Spartans were pressed for time. They needed to extricate themselves from Persia before the might of the Persian Empire became concentrated against them. The truce, played right into Persia's hand. Hamilton suggests that Agesilaus made the truce either to familiarize himself with the local conditions or because he was preoccupied with Lysander.⁸⁷ Even if Agesilaus was concerned with the local conditions and Lysander, it is surprising that he would enter into such a lengthy truce. Cartledge argues that Agesilaus made the truce due to military realities, most notably the lack of cavalry.⁸⁸ Whatever the actual reason or reasons for Agesilaus' truce, it confirms that the entire campaign was ill conceived and poorly carried out. Sparta hastily went to war with Persia in 400 and only later realized that it was poor strategic reasoning.⁸⁹

During the period of truce, Tissaphernes collected a massive army and threatened to make war on Agesilaus should he not leave Persia immediately. Rather than confront Tissaphernes, Agesilaus shocked the satrap by instead marching to plunder the province of Pharnabazus.⁹⁰ Agesilaus may have seen an opportunity to obtain booty with little risk to his army. As noted above, Pharnabazus was less capable than Tissaphernes.⁹¹ Though

⁸⁶ Xenophon 3.4.6.

⁸⁷ Hamilton, Agesilaus 96.

⁸⁸ Cartledge Agesilaos 213.

⁸⁹ Cartledge Agesilaos 212.

⁹⁰ Xenophon 3.4.10.

⁹¹ Westlake, "Spartan Intervention" 409.

he had many shortcomings at the strategic level, Agesilaus was certainly a capable military commander at the tactical and operation levels.

Agesilaus had with his earlier truce lost the initiative. His attempt to plunder Pharnabazus' satrapy, however, was thwarted by his lack of cavalry. Once again, the Spartans embarked on a task for which they lacked the resources. This seems to have been a common Spartan theme: enthusiastically start a war without being fully aware of the consequences, and then are forced to make ill conceived maneuvers out of desperation.

Agesilaus responded to his lack of cavalry with a massive recruitment drive. According to Xenophon, he ordered the wealthiest citizens in Asia Minor to either serve in his army themselves as cavalry or outfit a substitute. In the spring of 395, Agesilaus gathered the entire army at Ephesus for training.⁹² Xenophon reports that soon after arriving at Ephesus, Agesilaus had been in Asia Minor for one year.⁹³ In that year, he had done nothing to alter the strategic situation, which was rapidly turning against Sparta.

Finally in 395, Agesilaus was ready to fight. He marched with his new army towards Sardis. Diodorus suggests that Tissaphernes brought 10,000 cavalry and 50,000 infantry to oppose Agesilaus.⁹⁴ The Persian cavalry who were not in battle order continually were harassing Agesilaus as he advanced. They were caught completely by surprise when Agesilaus turned his army towards them. At the exact same moment, a

⁹² J. K. Anderson. "The Battle of Sardis in 395 B.C." *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* Vol. 7, (1974), 28.

⁹³ Xenophon 3.4.15.

⁹⁴ Diodorus 14.80.1.

concealed party of 1,400 troops attacked the Persian rear. Agesilaus force drove the Persian off killing 6,000 of them.⁹⁵

This was an important success for Agesilaus. He had killed 6,000 cavalry. It was the Persian cavalry that had previously been a major obstacle for success in Asia Minor. After the battle, the Persian King, fed up with the Greeks, blamed Tissaphernes for his failure to evict them from Persian territory. He had Tissaphernes beheaded and replaced by Tithraustes.⁹⁶

With his success against the Persians, more Asian cities came over to the Greeks.⁹⁷ According to Plutarch, Agesilaus prepared to invade Persia itself.⁹⁸ Xenophon agrees that Agesilaus did eventually intend to march into Persia though he first willingly marched back into Phrygia after he made a six-month truce with Tithraustes who also paid him thirty talents to leave Caria.⁹⁹ Agesilaus seemed to be completely unaware that the constant truces only worsened his strategic situation. History has continuously shown that failure to follow up on a victory tends to result in its negation.

At the same time as Agesilaus had won an important victory near Sardis, the new Persian fleet under Conon was fully complete and ready to challenge the Spartans for control of the sea. In desperation, Agesilaus ordered the cities on the coast of Asia Minor to supply him with ships in order to counter the Persian naval buildup. The Persian fleet had an experienced commander, and experienced rowers from Phoenicia. We do not know the rower quality of the Spartan fleet though it was probably inferior to that of the

⁹⁵ Diodorus 14.80.4. Plutarch. *Life of Agesilaus* trans. Stewart and Long. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1892) 10.

⁹⁶ Xenophon 3.4.18.

⁹⁷ Plutarch, *Agesilaus* 15.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

⁹⁹ Diodorus 14.80.8. Xenophon 3.4.18.

Persians. Their commander, Peisander was however inexperienced and according to Xenophon “not sufficient in details of equipment to achieve a great naval success.”¹⁰⁰

While Conon was preparing the fleet, Tithraustes, prepared to expand the war against Sparta. He dispatched Timocrates the Rhodian to Greece with 50 talents to encourage the other Greek states to join in an anti-Spartan alliance that Persia was willing to finance.¹⁰¹ The Spartans thanks to a lack of strategic foresight were about to become embroiled in a major strategic war.

¹⁰⁰ Xenophon 3.4.21.

¹⁰¹ Xenophon 3.5.1.

Chapter 4

In 496, the Persians sent Timocrates the Rhodian to Greece with money to encourage the leading Greek states to make war upon the Spartans. Each of the poleis Timocrates visited had reason to go to war with Sparta. Athens had not only lost her empire but also suffered devastation at the hands of the Spartan supported thirty tyrants. Corinth and Thebes, Sparta's major allies during the Peloponnesian War were deprived of their share of war booty and refused a spot at the peace table. Argos, Sparta's major Peloponnesian Rival, was always willing to challenge Sparta for influence in the Peloponnese. The four poleis became even more eager for war when Timocrates promised further Persian financial support.

Of the Greek poleis, Thebes was the most willing to go to war with Sparta. In addition to receiving poor treatment from her Spartan allies at the end of the Peloponnesian war, Agesilaus' attempt to sacrifice at Aulis was seen as an affront to her sovereignty. Rather than start a war against Sparta with aggressive action, Thebes encouraged her ally Lokris to provoke Phocis, a Spartan ally, by attempting to collect taxes in territory claimed by the Phocians.¹⁰² As expected, the Phocians responded by ravaging Lokrian territory. The Lokrians appealed to Thebes who sent an army against Phocis. The Phocians appealed to the Spartans for assistance. The Spartans responded by sending an army against Thebes who they were more than willing to fight. The Thebans had refused to join the Spartan expeditions against Athens, Elis, or Persia, had overtly assisted the Athenian exiles, and disrupted Agesilaus' attempt to sacrifice.

¹⁰² Xenophon 3.5.4.

Though the Thebans certainly had been injured by Sparta, the Theban policy of provoking the Spartans is surprising. The traditional viewpoint is that many of the Greek poleis were brought together by Persian gold in order to smash Spartan imperialism. Pearlman, however, cites events in Asia as an explanation for Theban policy.¹⁰³ He argues that all the Greek cities were fearful of Sparta's growing power and worried that her continued success in Asia Minor would lead to further Spartan domination on the mainland. For the alliance to come together, Sparta must have been seen as an overriding threat. Yet an attack on the Peloponnese would be seen by Greeks as naked aggression and may explain the Theban provocations. Certainly, this was not a war of expansion for the Thebans, who had already solidified control over the Boeotian Federation.¹⁰⁴

Pearlman suggests that the Spartan attack at Haliartus, a response to the Theban provocation, served only to heighten the allied fears of Spartan domination.¹⁰⁵ It is indeed true that Sparta directly attacked Thebes rather than conduct a proxy war. Pearlman argues that the Spartan response to the Theban intrigue rallied the anti-Spartan parties in many other poleis who feared that they might be next.¹⁰⁶ If Pearlman is correct, then it appears Sparta made a major strategic blunder: While still engaged in Asia Minor, Sparta opened up a second front

On a strategic level, Pearlman suggests that Sparta hoped that a quick victory would end the Theban provocations.¹⁰⁷ Yet was the attack on Haliartus a strategic necessity for the Spartans? Cartledge suggests: that "it could hardly be claimed that they

¹⁰³ S. Perlman. "The Causes and the Outbreak of the Corinthian War." *The Classical Quarterly* New Series, Vol. 14, No. 1 (May, 1964), 80.

¹⁰⁴ N. G. L. Hammond. "Political Developments in Boeotia" *The Classical Quarterly* New Series, Vol. 50, No. 1 (2000), 84.

¹⁰⁵ Pearlman, "Outbreak of the Corinthian War" 80.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Pearlman, "Outbreak of the Corinthian War" 85.

(the Spartans) had no workable choice.”¹⁰⁸ The Spartan attack against Thebes can be viewed as just that: an attack. Sparta did indeed have other options: she could send some form of aid to the Phocians without embarking on full-scale war.

If the Spartans were indeed responsible for starting the Corinthian War, then which Spartan in particular is to blame? Such shortsighted aggressive policy seems to fit in perfectly with Agesilaus, yet he was in Asia Minor and almost certainly aloof from Spartan affairs. We know too that Pausanias had no appetite for expansion. Therefore, the onus falls onto the only other major political figure in Sparta at the time: Lysander. Throughout Lysander’s career, he usually operated quite Machiavellian. Most notably, he did not start risky or foolish wars. Yet he appears to have been the driving force behind the attack against Thebes. The Spartan plan called for two armies to attack Thebes; an advance force led by Lysander, and the main force of Spartiates and allies led by Pausanias.¹⁰⁹ The fact that Lysander hastily launched a frontal assault on Haliartus without waiting for Pausanias’ main force to arrive shows his desperate situation. Lysander while still a powerful figure was not nearly what he had been in 404. It is possible that after Lysander’s falling out with Agesilaus and the surge in the popularity of the latter; Lysander saw an opportunity for military glory to reclaim his power.

The battle of Haliartus would however be a total disaster for Sparta. A Theban relief army caught Lysander’s attacking troops by surprise and routed them, killing him in the process. Pausanias force then arrived, recovered Lysander’s body under a truce with the Thebans, and withdrew. The Spartans, however, blamed Pausanias for the

¹⁰⁸ Cartledge, Agesilaos 360.

¹⁰⁹ Xenophon 3.5.21.

defeat, claiming he had arrived late, and then declined to fight.¹¹⁰ He was tried and sentenced to death. Before the sentence could be carried out however, Pausanias fled to Tegea.¹¹¹

The episode at Haliartus as well as the trial and conviction of Pausanias give excellent insight into Spartan internal politics. Clearly, Pausanias' faction had fallen out of favor at Sparta. This was probably due to the popularity and military success of Agesilaus, whose faction as of 396, probably included the imperialist Lysandrians. It is doubtful that the Lysandrian party who had joined Agesilaus' would have reverted to their old master: due to Agesilaus' military success and growing power, many former Lysandrians probably saw the Spartan king as their champion. The remarkable lack of opposition to the aggressive policies at Sparta as attested to by Westlake, confirms that an imperialist aggressive faction was in power at Sparta.¹¹² Essentially, Agesilaus had trumped over Lysander at the head of this faction. Lysander, however, still remained powerful and this probably enabled him to obtain the joint command with Pausanias.

Haliartus caused a major political upheaval at Sparta. The Spartans had just lost two of their most able generals and statesmen. Additionally, Sparta now had only one king as Pausanias' son Agesipolis was not yet of age.¹¹³ Xenophon states that Agesilaus was recalled due to the fact that there was an anti-Spartan alliance and Sparta herself was threatened.¹¹⁴ It is probable that there were other reasons for Agesilaus' recall: there was currently a leadership void at Sparta. There were undoubtedly many Spartiates who

¹¹⁰ Xenophon 3.5.24.

¹¹¹ Xenophon 3.5.25.

¹¹² H. D. Westlake. "The Sources for the Spartan Debacle at Haliartus." *Phoenix* Vol. 39, No. 2 (Summer, 1985), 125.

¹¹³ Xenophon 4.2.3.

¹¹⁴ Xenophon 4.2.1.

feared that without a king's leadership, non-royal and possibly radical factionalism could emerge. Agesilaus too almost certainly desired to return to Sparta in order to assert his new position.

The political unrest at Sparta also translated into strategic ramifications. It is clear that Agesilaus was ordered to return to Sparta. What of the army? Xenophon states that just Agesilaus was ordered to return.¹¹⁵ Diodorus, however, states that the recall order was for Agesilaus and the army.¹¹⁶ We know from Xenophon that Agesilaus left 4,000 men behind in Asia Minor. Therefore, the order must have been ambiguous, as Agesilaus, always obedient to the ephors, would surely have brought his entire army with him if the ephors had commanded it. Diodorus may have meant that only the Spartiate contingent was ordered to return.

It was perfectly logical for Agesilaus to return. In bringing the army with him, he made a major strategic miscalculation. The Persians were unquestionably the cause of the war in Greece. By leaving Asia Minor, Agesilaus had essentially given the Persians a major strategic victory. Without a battle, the Spartans had voluntarily surrendered their greatest strategic advantage: a large aggressive hoplite army in Asia Minor.

Clearly, Persian money had a major role in the allies joining together against Sparta. While each of the allied states was greatly upset with Sparta, their armies, even combined were inferior to the army of Sparta. Further, the allies had few if any naval forces. As a result of their disposition, they made no attempt at outright war with Sparta prior to the intervention of Persia in 397. Sparta in 397 still had her Persian supplied fleet and as long as she controlled the Ionian Cities, the option of collecting tribute or

¹¹⁵ Xenophon 4.2.1.

¹¹⁶ Diodorus 14.83.1.

obtaining “voluntary contributions” for maintaining a navy. By withdrawing from Persia, Sparta broke off the fight from her most powerful and dangerous adversary.

We must also assess the threat level the allies posed to Sparta in order to truly understand if Agesilaus needed to return with the entirety of the army. Whenever Sparta engaged in the Lysandrian style of expeditionary warfare, it was almost always with troops she did not deem vital for her security. The exception was the contingent of Spartiates sent to serve with Agesilaus. The size of the Spartiate contingent in Asia Minor is very uncertain. We know there were 30 Spartiates to begin with but these were withdrawn after the first year and replaced. At the battle near Sardis, Xenophon writes of Agesilaus sending forward his 10-year service men, a clear mark of Spartiate participation.¹¹⁷ It is likely that the second batch of 30 Spartiates who arrived in Agesilaus’ second year of command to replace the original 30 were intended to act not only as staff officers but also as a small elite guard. It is probable that the ephors, in recalling Agesilaus, intended for the return of the Spartiate contingent as well as the king himself to provide leadership. As the other Greeks threatened her, Sparta needed every Spartiate including the king ready to fight.

Xenophon states that for his return to Europe, Agesilaus wished to bring as “large and fine an army as possible”¹¹⁸ Xenophon makes it clear that Agesilaus and not the ephors decided to bring the entire army. It is likely that Agesilaus, as he often did, misread the strategic situation. He knew there were enemies of Sparta that had to be fought. We know from Agesilaus’ later life that he was very capable of bringing forces to battle while ignoring strategic implications. His decision to withdraw the entire army

¹¹⁷ Xenophon 3.4.23.

¹¹⁸ Xenophon 4.2.1.

from Asia Minor is just one example in a career marked by a lack of strategic understanding.

In mainland Greece, the Corinthians and Argives had joined the Theban-Athenian alliance. They formed a council at Corinth and prepared to invade the Peloponnese.¹¹⁹ Each side then called up large armies. The allies according to Diodorus had 15,000 infantry and 500 cavalry while the Spartans levied 23,000 infantry and 500 cavalry.¹²⁰ Xenophon suggests 24,000 infantry and 1,550 cavalry for the allies.¹²¹ For the Spartans he suggests 13,500 infantry, 700 light troops, and 600 cavalry.¹²² In the ensuing clash, the Spartans defeated each allied contingent and drove them from the battlefield. The allies had suffered 2800 dead while the Spartans 1100, of which only 8 were Spartiates.¹²³¹²⁴ Sparta's victory at Nemea had prevented an invasion of the Peloponnese but was certainly not decisive enough to end the war.

The war then shifted to the sea where Conon finally caught up with the Spartan fleet. The two fleets engaged off Cnidus. The Persian squadron decisively defeated the Spartans thanks to Conon's superior skill.¹²⁵¹²⁶ Sparta was now without a fleet and without the money necessary to rebuild one. Sparta had tried to engage in a major strategic and multi front war when she had not the economic means to fight it. Further, by abandoning Asia Minor, Agesilaus gave up the only potential source for contributions, either financial or in the form of ships. Although Sparta had ceased to collect tribute from

¹¹⁹ Xenophon 4.2.10.

¹²⁰ Diodorus 14.82.10.

¹²¹ Xenophon 4.2.10.

¹²² Xenophon 4.2.10.

¹²³ Diodorus 14.83.2

¹²⁴ Xenophon 4.3.1.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Diodorus 14.83.6

the cities in Asia Minor, their “voluntary” contributions to the Spartan fleet suggests that they nonetheless played a key role especially in regard to ship construction.¹²⁷

Almost simultaneously to the naval defeat at Cnidus, Agesilaus arrived back in central Greece with an army over 10,000 and more than 1,000 talents in war booty.¹²⁸ The allies set out to meet Agesilaus whose army was reinforced with Spartiates. The two armies met at Coronea. As at Nemea, the Spartans on the right routed the Argives who opposed them, while the Thebans on the allied right broke through the Orchomenians. Again as at Nemea, the Thebans turned first to relieve their routed comrades. Unlike Nemea, the Spartans did not wait for them to pass and hit them in the flank. Instead Agesilaus ordered his men to attack the Thebans head on.

In the ensuing clash, the Thebans held their ground against Agesilaus. Both sides endured heavy casualties until finally the Spartans allowed the Thebans to pass through their lines and return to their camp. Though the Spartans were left in possession of the battlefield, they had not won a victory. The Thebans had fought the best army in Greece to a standstill. Coronea was essentially a draw.¹²⁹ Plutarch states that after Coronea the Spartans “could not boast of having conquered the Thebans.”¹³⁰

The clash between the Spartans and Thebans was largely unnecessary. Agesilaus attacked the Thebans head on out of a personal hatred for them.¹³¹ Not only had they not followed Sparta in attacks against Athens, Elis, and Persia, but they had also disrupted Agesilaus’ sacrifice at Aulis. Even Xenophon, normally a fervent admirer of Agesilaus,

¹²⁷ Xenophon 4.2.19.

¹²⁸ Paul Cartledge, *The Spartans The World of the Warrior-Heroes of Ancient Greece, from Utopia to Crisis and Collapse*. (Woodstock and New York: The Overlook Press, 2002) 216.

¹²⁹ Mark Munn. “Thebes and Central Greece” *The Greek World in the Fourth Century From the fall of the Athenian Empire to the successors of Alexander*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) 73.

¹³⁰ Plutarch. *Life of Agesilaus*, trans. Anthony Stewart and George Long. (London: George Bell and Sons, 1892) 18.

¹³¹ Munn, *Thebes* 73.

reluctantly acknowledges the recklessness of Agesilaus decision.¹³² In total, casualties were 600 amongst the allies and 350 for the Spartans. Agesilaus too had been seriously wounded.

Under truce each side recovered their dead. Agesilaus marched to Sparta. En route however the Lokrians continuously harassed the Spartans, who lost 18 Spartiates including a polemarch.¹³³ In all, the battle of Coronea and the subsequent harassment of the Spartans confirmed that a stalemate existed on land. Sparta could not continue the war at the rate she was losing Spartiates.

At sea the war continued to go poorly for the Spartans. Pharnabazus and Conon fresh off their victory at Cnidus went throughout the Aegean removing the Spartan harmosts.¹³⁴ Sparta with no fleet of her own could not offer any opposition. Things became even worse for Sparta when Pharnabazus not only officially gave control over the Persian fleet to Conon, but also money to rebuild the long walls.¹³⁵ Overall, the war had turned to stalemate.

In Sparta, there were some who wished for peace, seeing no favorable outcome by continued fighting. Those who desired peace had been linked to Pausanias. This peace faction sent Antalkidas to negotiate with Persia. Their concept was to negotiate with a certain Tiribazus, (Xenophon calls him “a general of the king.”¹³⁶) who was already suspicious of Conon, to convince the king to end financial support for the allies. In exchange, Antalkidas offered to renounce the Greek claim to the Ionian cities. Tiribazus was delighted by the proposal but unwilling to make any major agreement without first

¹³² Xenophon 4.3.18.

¹³³ Xenophon 4.3.21.

¹³⁴ Xenophon 4.8.5.

¹³⁵ Xenophon 4.8.9.

¹³⁶ Xenophon 4.8.15.

consulting the king. Further the allies who had the upper hand militarily saw no need for peace. The autonomy clause was especially undesirable as each city intended to retain their recently captured territories. Without the allied agreement, the proposed peace collapsed. Artaxerxes had no intention on imposing a peace upon the allies who were in essence his clients.

Undoubtedly the peace initiative had nothing to do with Agesilaus. If Agesilaus played any part in the peace, surely Xenophon would note it. Also, the fact that Antalkidas, a noted rival of Agesilaus served as the ambassador to Persia further confirms that a “peace” faction, likely formed from those who had supported Pausanias, had emerged at Sparta. The “peace” faction seemed to be cautious on foreign affairs. They had no illusions on maintaining an Aegean empire and Spartan traditional economic practices at the same time. Additionally, without Lysander there was no impetus for an Aegean Empire. Agesilaus, whose faction likely included former Lysandrians such as Dercylidas, had supported an Aegean empire in the past though only at the urging of Lysander.

Devoto argues that while Agesilaus was not opposed to peace, was opposed to achieving a peace by surrendering the cities of Asia Minor to Persia. The Persians for their part were reluctant to come to terms with the Spartan after all the damage they had done to Asia Minor.¹³⁷ Devote further suggests that Tiribazus’ secretly giving money to Antalkidas for a fleet, actually encouraged the war policy of Agesilaus.¹³⁸ We do indeed see around 392 and upsurge in Spartan naval activities, confirming the importance of Tiribazus’ support.

¹³⁷ James G. Devoto. “Agesilaus, Antalcidas, and the Failed Peace of 392/91 B.C.” *Classical Philology* Vol. 81, No. 3 (Jul., 1986), 196.

¹³⁸ Devoto. “Failed Peace” 195.

Unfortunately we are largely ignorant of the Persian side of events due to a lack of written record, as there are many questions surrounding the Persian role in Greece from 392-387. Artaxerxes could not have been quite so vehemently anti-Spartan or he would not even consider peace. Further, it is highly doubtful that Tiribazus could “secretly” finance an entire Spartan fleet, especially after he had supposedly been removed from his position.¹³⁹ We know that Persia’s objective was for possession of the Ionian Cities by way of a negotiated settlement. Perhaps Artaxerxes may have seen Tiribazus’ subsidy as a way to encourage the Spartans to come to the peace table. By remaining officially anti-Spartan, however, Artaxerxes could keep his options open.

Even after the Spartans built a new fleet, the war continued to go badly for them. While the stalemate continued on land, Conon’s fleet began to raid Laconia. Argos managed to garrison Corinth and integrate her into Argos creating what historians have referred to as the union of Argocorinth.¹⁴⁰ Then in 390, a unit of peltasts under the Athenian general Iphikrates ambushed an entire Spartan regiment near Lechaeum and killed 250 of 600 men.¹⁴¹ Many of the men killed were Spartiate who Xenophon refers to as “the pick and flower of the division.”¹⁴² Further evidence for the large Spartiate and casualty rate come from Xenophon clearly stating that the men cut down were of the 10 year and 15 year service classes. These classes did not exist amongst the Perioikic hoplites. Such a defeat was a tremendous blow to Sparta. In losing 250 Spartiates, Sparta had lost more than 10% of her entire Spartiate population including many of her best troops, the 10 and 15-year classes.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Cartledge, Agesilaos 364.

¹⁴¹ Xenophon 4.5.22.

¹⁴² Xenophon 4.5.19.

After Lechaeum, the fighting moved largely to the periphery. Unable to defeat the Spartans on land, the Athenians continued to expand their possessions at sea. In 388, the Athenians launched an expedition to Cyprus that undoubtedly caused alarm in Persia. The purpose of the Athenian expedition to Cyprus was to aid Evagoras, the Cypriot king who was in open revolt against Artaxerxes and secure him as an Athenian client.

It was probably this event that caused the peace party at Sparta to take action. They were able to get Antalkidas appointed admiral. Utilizing this position, Antalkidas again went to Persia to try to convince the king to switch his support.

Antalkidas must have convinced Artaxerxes that by switching his backing to Sparta, he could obtain a peace in mainland Greece that the allies would accept. Promising to renounce any Greek claim to the cities of Ionia only sweetened the deal for Artaxerxes who accepted the proposal in 388.

The treaty was unusual not in its terms but the manner by which it was constructed. The Antalkidas-Artaxerxes meeting produced a long-term peace plan even before the belligerents agreed to a truce. Sparta would make war with Persian backing against any polis that refused to abide by the peace.

Cartledge suggests that fear of Athens caused Artaxerxes to switch his support to Sparta.¹⁴³ If this is true then it certainly lends credence to the fact that Persia was already “playing both sides” or at least conceiving of such in 392. While fear of Athens may have motivated Persia to switch sides, we must ask why Agesilaus who essentially was totally opposed to accord with Persia only 5 years earlier, change his mind?

¹⁴³ Cartledge Agesilaos 366.

Rice suggests that Agesilaus was legitimately concerned given the Spartan manpower losses.¹⁴⁴ Yet this is unlikely as Agesilaus showed no concern for dwindling Spartan manpower throughout the next decade. Cartledge argues that overall war exhaustion forced the Spartans to the negotiating table.¹⁴⁵ It is doubtful that Agesilaus would give in and agree to surrender the Ionian Cities. It is therefore probable that many Spartans even the most ardent supporters of Agesilaus saw that this peace deal as the best option. It is quite possible that the peace had such great support in Sparta that Agesilaus was forced to yield to popular Spartan demands.

The peace plan shows a clear pragmatism on the part of Antalkidas. Though it called for all poleis to be autonomous, it allowed the Athenians to retain Lemnos, Scyros, and Imbros. Controlling these three islands essentially gave the Athenians the ability to retain part of their Aegean Empire. The Athenians would be far less likely to agree to peace if they were forced to relinquish everything they gained in the previous six years. If the Athenians continued to fight on, Artaxerxes might very well have changed his mind again and switched his backing. He backed Antalkidas on the promise that he could end the war quickly.

Artaxerxes accepted Antalkidas' proposal in 388. He promised to switch his support to Sparta and make war against any Poleis that did not accept the peace. Though Antalkidas returned with a peace deal he now had to implement it. Antalkidas sailed to the Hellespont where he defeated a small Athenian squadron of 8 triremes.¹⁴⁶ Cartledge

¹⁴⁴ David G. Rice. "Agesilaus, Agesipolis, and Spartan Politics, 386-379 B.C." *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* Vol. 23, No. 2 (2nd Qtr., 1974), 166.

¹⁴⁵ Cartledge *Agesilaos* 368.

¹⁴⁶ Xenophon 5.1.12.

and Hamilton sight this event as bringing the Athenians to the peace table.¹⁴⁷¹⁴⁸ Both authors claim Athens lost the Hellespont. Loosing 8 triremes certainly does not qualify as a major defeat. Also, we see from Xenophon that the Athenians only sought peace after Antalkidas' fleet grew to 80 ships. This event certainly happened in the aftermath of the Athenian defeat. Antalkidas was en route to joining up with squadrons from Syracuse and Ionia when he encountered the Athenians.¹⁴⁹

Xenophon states that the Athenians agreed to peace, as they were fearful of a Persian financed Spartan fleet cutting the Hellespont, as they had done in the Peloponnesian War. It is also possible that finance played a role in the Athenian decision to treat for peace. Once Artaxerxes switched his support to Sparta, he would have cut off Athens. The satraps however seemed to have had some independence at least in granting financial support to the Greeks (Tiribazus financed Sparta without official permission) Pharnabazus, the satrap who had been the greatest supporter of Athens was in the capital in order to marry the Artaxerxes' daughter.¹⁵⁰ Ariobarzanes who was in charge in Phranabazus' stead was a close friend of Antalkidas. Completely cut off from Persian funds, the Athenians would have had severe difficulties in financing and maintaining a large fleet themselves, especially without tribute from their empire. The Athenians therefore likely saw the Persian-Spartan peace deal whereby they retained Lemnos, Scyros, and Imbros as fair enough to their situation. In all, the Athenians had minimal gains. They had started the war without any Aegean territories and gained three.

¹⁴⁷ Charles Hamilton. "Sparta." *The Greek World in the Fourth Century From the fall of the Athenian Empire to the successors of Alexander*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) 75.

¹⁴⁸ Cartledge, Agesilaos 368.

¹⁴⁹ Xenophon 5.1.15.

¹⁵⁰ Xenophon 5.1.15.

Once the Athenians were out of the war, the Argives, Corinthians, and Thebans were willing to make peace. Even combined, they were no match for a Persian-financed Sparta. The greatest impediment to peace, however, was the Boeotian Federation. The Spartans demanded that the Thebans sign the peace treaty as “the Thebans” not “the Boeotians,” withdraw from the cities of Boeotia and disband the Boeotian Federation as part of the autonomy clause in the peace treaty. The Theban ambassadors initially refused, claiming they had instructions to sign for all of Boeotia. Agesilaus refused to allow this and threatened to exclude Thebes from the peace. Faced with the prospect of facing Sparta and Persia alone, the Thebans acquiesced.¹⁵¹

The so-called peace of Antalkidas was a major victory for the Spartans. Though she lost control over the Aegean, she had forced Thebes to disband the Boeotian federation. Athens had only a remnant of her former empire and posed very little threat to Sparta. Sparta was again hegemon of Greece. This Spartan hegemony however seemed to restore the balance of power all the way back to the pre-Athenian Empire times.

Agesilaus as the victorious and popular general was sure to play a major role in Spartan politics. The cautious faction of Antalkidas was probably unsure as to what type of statesman Agesilaus might be. At this point, he had dutifully obeyed the ephors and had done nothing to distinguish himself diplomatically.

Overall, the Corinthian War was somewhat of a pyrrhic victory for the Spartans. For the second time in just over 20 years, Sparta had treated with Persia and traded the independence of the Ionian cities for Persian financial support. This only served to increase anti-Spartan sentiment amongst the Greeks. Sparta’s need for Persian cash also exposed a major weakness in Sparta’s economy: there was no system by which money

¹⁵¹ Xenophon 5.1.20.

could be raised to finance a fleet to win a naval war. On land as well, Sparta had shown weakness. Of the two great battles, Nemea and Coronea, none were decisive Spartan victories and attests to the fact that Sparta had to rely increasingly on Perioikoi and allies for the bulk of her manpower.

While it has already been mentioned that Spartan success at sea was due to Persian financial support, the fact that Sparta could not even win the land war, the environment in which she was supposedly exceptional, confirms a major weakness. Persian diplomacy and threats created an environment where the allies were forced to agree to a peace favorable to Sparta. In the coming years, Sparta would act as if it had won decisive victory. This manner of action would result in disaster.

Chapter 5

In 386, there was finally peace. Sparta had essentially achieved her foreign policy objectives from the Peloponnesian War. The Athenian empire was a shell of its former self and did not have the strength to interfere at all in the isthmus or Peloponnese. The Theban led Boeotian Federation, the major land power in Central Greece, was no longer a threat to Spartan interests. As a result of the Peace of Antalkidas, Thebes was forced to disband that entity. The Argive garrison in Corinth was withdrawn and the Corinthian oligarchs returned to govern their city. Argos, Sparta's traditional enemy in the Peloponnese was isolated and fearful of Spartan power.

Internally, Agesipolis, the son of Pausanias had come of age and was seated on the Agid throne. Agesipolis had likely assumed the mantle of leadership of Pausanias' traditional anti-imperialism faction. Agesilaus returned to Sparta in 386 after more than 10 years of near constant campaigning. Due to his age and military success, Agesilaus was unquestionably the senior and more powerful king. Agesilaus' success as a general, seniority, reputation, and charisma certainly attracted many followers. As a result, his faction was likely far more powerful than that of the young and inexperienced Agesipolis. Agesilaus however had almost no experience in handling matters of state or foreign policy. During the Corinthian War, these matters were conducted by those allied to Pausanias.

The military balance in 386 also favored Sparta though not as heavily as in the past. Spartiate numbers were in serious decline and the Spartan morae became more

reliant on Periokic hoplites, who, though good soldiers were inferior to the Spartiates.¹⁵² In addition to the decline of Spartiates due to socioeconomic factors, Sparta had suffered heavy casualties during the Corinthian War. Using Figueira's population graph, Sparta had at Nemea 1,833 Spartiates or two thirds of the total Spartiate population of 2,777. We know 8 Spartiates were lost at that battle, 18 in the withdrawal from Coronea, and 250 at Lechaemum.¹⁵³

We must also figure out the Spartan casualties in the clash with the Thebans at Coronea. At this battle Plutarch writes that there was much loss of life on the Spartan side. In an exhaustive study of Greek battles, Victor Davis Hansen concluded a 5% standard casualty rate for both sides during the *othismos* or push.¹⁵⁴ This comes to 45 Lacedaemonians (both Spartiates and Periokoi) of the 900 (we know there were 1 and a half morae of 600 men at the battle.) Figueira suggests Spartiates formed 38% of the Lacedaemonian Morae. Assuming Spartiates sustained the same casualty rate as the Periokoi then 17 Spartiates or 38% of all 45 Lacedaemonian casualties in the clash. This leads to a total of 35 Spartiate dead in the Coronea Campaign and a grand total of 293 Spartiate combat deaths in the Corinthian War.

Due to a declining Spartiate birth rate, the number of Spartiates graduating the agoge was barely if at all able to keep up with the yearly attrition.¹⁵⁵ Therefore, Spartiate casualties on the battlefield became irreplaceable. To risk Spartiates in anything but the direst circumstances was at best irresponsible and at worst catastrophic.

¹⁵² Eremin. "Settlement of Spartan Poleis" 285.

¹⁵³ Figueira. "Population Patterns" 212.

¹⁵⁴ Victor Davis Hansen, *The Western Way of War Infantry Battle in Classical Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989) 209.

¹⁵⁵ Hodkinson. Property and Wealth 394.

In spite of the shortage of manpower, Sparta took up a new aggressive policy towards their former allies. Xenophon matter-of-factly states the purpose of this policy was to “chastise” those whose loyalty was in question. Mantinea was the first target of Spartan aggression.¹⁵⁶ The Spartan’s claimed that Mantinea had fought poorly in Spartan service and delighted at any Spartan plight.¹⁵⁷

Diodorus suggests the Spartan’s took an aggressive policy towards Mantinea as they wished to rebuild their empire.¹⁵⁸ The Spartan’s according to Diodorus intended to set up their own partisans in any poleis where they suspected even the slightest hint of disloyalty.¹⁵⁹ Xenophon probably ignored this fact, as he did not want to admit that Sparta so blatantly broke the peace of Antalkidas. Sparta demanded Mantinea tear down her walls. Without fortifications, the Spartans believed Mantinea would be a loyal ally.¹⁶⁰

Cartledge refers to the Spartan policy toward Mantinea as “pure reaction”¹⁶¹ This reaction being to the existence of a democracy in the Peloponnese. There was indeed a democratic faction in power at Mantinea but as Cartledge acknowledges it is unclear that the majority of democrats were anti-Spartan.¹⁶² In fact it is probable that only the minority of the democrats were a part of the pro-Argive/anti-Spartan faction. It seems as though there was an unusually high level of paranoia about democracy in Sparta after the Corinthian War. The Spartans traditionally, while certainly no lovers of democracy, were tolerant of its existence even within the Peloponnese. Cartledge argues that the Spartans subjugated their distrust of democracy to geopolitical realities. In order to keep poleis

¹⁵⁶ Xenophon 5.2.1.

¹⁵⁷ Xenophon 5.2.4.

¹⁵⁸ Diodorus 15.5.1.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Xenophon 5.2.2.

¹⁶¹ Cartledge, Agesilaus 261.

¹⁶² Ibid.

such as Mantinea and Elis within the alliance, Sparta had to allow them a fair amount of internal autonomy.¹⁶³

Hamilton agrees with Cartledge about the cause of the Spartan intervention, declaring them to be acting out of “spite.”¹⁶⁴ The Spartan action against Mantinea does indeed appear to be one of “spite” or “reaction.” Cawkwell, however, suggests that the attack on Mantinea was justifiable and essential for Spartan security.¹⁶⁵ He suggests that Mantinea had an independent streak, which Sparta could not tolerate so close to her borders.¹⁶⁶ Even if there was some strategic justification for the attack - Mantinea may not have been the most stalwart ally of Sparta – it certainly was not enough reason for Sparta to risk manpower and popular opinion in an attack. We can say for certain, that Mantinea while maybe not a great ally was an ally nonetheless and showed no hostility towards Sparta.

Though Xenophon avoids implicating Agesilaus, it is almost certain that he was behind this new policy. Agesilaus was the most powerful man in Sparta and would certainly have had to approve of any foreign policy decision. Why however, did Agesilaus decide to immediately go to war immediately after the peace of Antalkidas? Diodorus states “The Lacedaemonians, however, who by their nature loved to command and by policy preferred war, would not tolerate the peace which they considered to be a heavy burden, and longing for their past dominance over Greece, they were poised and alert to begin a new movement.”¹⁶⁷ If we substitute “Agesilaus” for “Lacedaemonians”

¹⁶³ Cartledge, Agesilaus 259.

¹⁶⁴ Hamilton, Agesilaus 126.

¹⁶⁵ G. L. Cawkwell. “Agesilaus and Sparta.” *The Classical Quarterly* New Series, Vol. 26, No. 1 (1976), 76

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Diodorus 15.5.1.

Diodorus' statement comes together perfectly. Certainly there were many Spartans who did not prefer war as the constant peace efforts attest. Those who desired to return to "their past dominance" were almost certainly Lysandrians, many of whom were supporters of Agesilaus. Agesilaus "by nature" probably did "love to command" as he had known only war throughout nearly his entire period of rule. He also probably did prefer war to peace, as he was far more experienced and comfortable with the former.

Agesilaus undoubtedly had been influenced by Lysander's ideas of imperialism. He however lacked the creativity and ingenuity of his mentor. As a result, Agesilaus acted in the only manner he was comfortable with: open war.

Agesilaus' Mantinea policy was a failure of grand strategy. The best-case scenario for Sparta would be a docile and compliant Mantinea. Even if this were to happen, it would be foolish for the Spartans to think that the Mantineans' performance in battle might greatly improve. Certainly, the Mantineans would be *less* inclined to fight well for Sparta if she injured them. In Ancient Greek battles, the most effective troops were almost always those who believed most in the cause. Forcing Mantinea to tear down her wall would certainly not improve the disposition of the average Mantineans' hoplite towards Sparta.

There is a further critique of Agesilaus' Mantinea policy: the issue of Greek popular opinion. If Mantinea were not to acquiesce to the Spartan demands (why would she?) Sparta would be forced to attack. How would such an expedition appear to Greek popular opinion? Sparta had just signed a peace treaty promising non-intervention and autonomy for all Greek Poleis. Not only might the Spartans go to war with an ally the

cause of which being ambiguous at best, but she would force her *own allies* (who were also allies with Mantinea) to join her.

We cannot however condemn Agesilaus entirely for his aggressive policy toward Mantinea. That Polis had caused issue in the past for Sparta and may very well not have been a great ally to Sparta during the Corinthian War. Additionally, the concept of forcing allies of questionable loyalty to tear down their fortifications was not new in Greece. Thebes had acted in the exact same manner towards Thespieae during the Peloponnesian War. Of all the reasons for or against attacking Mantinea, it is the timing of the campaign, right after the peace of Antalkidas that raises the greatest question of Agesilaus' strategic thinking.

Hamilton justifies the policy, arguing that Mantinea, in addition to being an unreliable ally did pose a threat to Spartan dominance in the Peloponnese.¹⁶⁸ Hamilton cites the gleefulness of the Mantineans at the Spartan disaster at Lechaem in 390 and that they had recently prospered.¹⁶⁹ These factors do not constitute a threat even in ancient Greek terms. Mantinea though prosperous gave not even the slightest hint that it had expansionism in mind. Further, Mantinea was not a major power. We hear from Diodorus that they were able to deploy only 3,000 hoplites at the battle of Mantinea in 418.¹⁷⁰

The “threat” from Mantinea may have been the existence of democracy. Traditionally, Spartan kings tolerated democracy even within the Peloponnese. Agesilaus however probably had a different view of democracy than the previous Spartan kings. For the preceding 8 years Agesilaus led the Spartan war effort against Athens, Thebes,

¹⁶⁸ Hamilton, Agesilaus 129.

¹⁶⁹ Hamilton, Agesilaus 126.

¹⁷⁰ Diodorus 12.78.5.

Corinth, and Argos. Besides Athens we have very little information on the governments of the allies. We do know that Argos had some form of democracy and anti-Spartan factions had come to power in Corinth and Thebes. In the fight for control of Corinth, the epicenter of the war, the lines were very clear: the Thebans, Argives, and Athenians supported the anti-Spartan faction, which also was democratic. The Corinthian exiles at Lechaenum consisted mostly of aristocrats who held pro-Spartan views. We know that Agesilaus spent much of the Corinthian war at Lechaenum. While there, he probably came to associate democracy as inherently threatening to Sparta. The Corinthian exiles who desired to retake control of their city certainly encouraged the view. In his shortsightedness and narrow-mindedness, Agesilaus perceived the democracy in Mantinea to be an enemy of Sparta even if strategic reality suggested otherwise.

When Mantinea refused Sparta's demands, the Spartans went to war.¹⁷¹ In spite of Agesilaus preeminent power at Sparta, he refused to lead the army against Mantinea claiming the Mantineans had rendered service to his father.¹⁷² The task of attacking Mantinea fell to the junior king Agesipolis. Xenophon notes the irony that it was Agesipolis whose father Pausanias had good relations with the Mantineans. Xenophon is likely displaying the power of Agesilaus, suggesting that even though the relationship between Mantinea and Pausanias (Agesipolis' father) was more recent and stronger than the relationship Archidamus (Agesilaus' father) had with the Mantineans, Agesipolis was nonetheless forced to lead the expedition. Agesilaus let it be known that he held the power at Sparta, even over the other king.

¹⁷¹ Xenophon 5.2.3.

¹⁷² Xenophon 5.2.4.

In 385, the expedition set out. Even after the Spartans ravaged their territory, the Mantineans had no intention of surrendering. Tearing down a wall was tantamount to conceding independence. Not surprisingly, the Mantineans continuously refused the Spartan demands. In response, Agesipolis brought the city of Mantinea itself under siege. According to Xenophon, the Mantineans had an unusually large supply of food within their city.¹⁷³ Due to this fact Agesipolis chose an unusually innovative course of action: he dammed up the river that went through Mantinea. This caused substantial flooding and weakened the foundations of the walls to the point that they collapsed.¹⁷⁴ With their wall in tatters, the Mantineans were forced to surrender.

The Spartans peace terms went beyond removal of the fortifications: they ordered that the Mantineans, in addition to tearing down their walls, disperse into their four original villages. Diodorus claims that this was part of the original demand.¹⁷⁵ That however is doubtful. Such a level of harshness would be unprecedented even for the Spartans.

Xenophon suggests that after the Mantineans surrendered, the democratic faction feared for their lives.¹⁷⁶ As a result they secured safe passage into exile thanks to the efforts of Pausanias.¹⁷⁷ Why would the democrats have to fear for their lives? We know there was an aristocratic pro-Spartan party at Mantinea but the two factions had coexisted in the past. The democrats were clearly aware that Sparta intended to intervene directly in internal Mantinean affairs. Without the democrats, Sparta could set up a pro-Spartan oligarchy at Mantinea. Almost certainly Agesilaus was behind this policy. It is doubtful

¹⁷³ Xenophon 5.2.7.

¹⁷⁴ Xenophon 5.2.8.

¹⁷⁵ Diodorus 15.5.4.

¹⁷⁶ Xenophon 5.2.6.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

that Agesipolis, by far the junior and weaker king would dare embark on any policy not approved by Agesilaus.

The episode of the Spartan invasion of Mantinea proves that Agesilaus and his faction were the unquestioned rulers of Sparta. They acted as a narrow elite clique within the Spartan government, essentially an oligarchy inside an oligarchy. Agesilaus was more a dictator than a Spartan king acting under the orders of the ephors. The ephors were almost certainly his own supporters who acceded to their position due to his influence. Further, Agesilaus and his faction had no illusions about upholding the peace of Antalkidas. They had every intention of ruling all of Greece either directly or by setting up puppet states. Not even the slightest opposition would be tolerated.

Chapter 6

In 382, Sparta launched a major expedition against the northern Greek city of Olynthus. This event undoubtedly removed any doubt amongst the Greeks that the events at Mantinea occurred in isolation. The war against Mantinea was part of a larger Spartan drive for absolute control over Greece.

Xenophon and Diodorus disagree over the cause of the Olynthian expedition. Xenophon suggests that the impetus came when ambassadors from Acanthus and Apollonia arrived at Sparta requesting help. These ambassadors claimed that Olynthus had formed a confederation and demanded the Acanthians and Apollonians submit to their rule. They further claimed that this Olynthian confederation was a major threat to Sparta as they were preparing to enter into an alliance with Thebes and Athens as well as expand their own power into Thrace and Macedonia.¹⁷⁸ It seems unlikely that even Agesilaus, as foolish as he was in matters of foreign policy would embark upon a major expedition to a city more than 250 miles away from Sparta at the impetus of the Apollonians and Acanthians.

Diodorus acknowledges that ambassadors from Macedonia and not Apollonia or Acanthus did arrive at Sparta to request help against Olynthus.¹⁷⁹ He also writes that Sparta already had designs upon expanding into Thrace and was waiting for the justification to attack. The ambassadors, wherever they came from, provided the opportunity. Sparta could launch an expedition and if called to task, claim that she was

¹⁷⁸ Xenophon 5.2.14.

¹⁷⁹ Diodorus 15.19.4.

upholding the autonomy clause in the peace of Antalkidas. This claim however was a thinly veiled cover for blatant Spartan imperialism that most Greeks likely saw through.

Cawkwell suggests that the attack against Olynthus shattered any illusion that Agesilaus was acting in the interests of Greeks. He cites the fact that Sparta came to the aid of Macedonia, (a state whose credentials as being Greek were at best ambiguous) against the Olynthians, whose Greek identity was without question.¹⁸⁰ Perhaps Xenophon chose to ignore this as coming to the aid of “barbarous Macedonians” against fellow Greeks represented a great hypocrisy for the supposed protector of Greece.

For the expedition, Sparta prepared a main army of 10,000 men and an advance force of 2,000, which according to Xenophon was created in order to lend immediate support to the Apollonians and Acanthians while the larger army was gathering. In assembling the main force, Sparta made an interesting concession: rather than supply men, each city had the option of supplying money to hire mercenaries.

Hamilton praises the concession as Spartan flexibility as the Spartan allies were strained for manpower.¹⁸¹ Yet it was totally unlike Agesilaus to even consider such a compromise unless it was clearly beneficial to Sparta. So why the compromise? Millender suggests that Sparta preferred to use mercenaries, as they were more reliable.¹⁸² As mercenaries received pay for their service, they could stay on duty for more than just the campaigning season. Consistent pay gave the mercenaries a reason to fight. Troops called out from the allies were not paid and fought for ideas. Service for Sparta was blatantly imperialistic and void of the traditional ideas of freedom, independence, and patriotism for which Greeks fought. It would be difficult to convince

¹⁸⁰ Cawkwell, “Agesilaus and Sparta” 77.

¹⁸¹ Hamilton, Agesilaus 138.

¹⁸² Millender, “Spartan Mercenary” 248.

the average hoplite that service under the Spartans at Olynthus, 250 miles from the Peloponnese, encompassed any of these ideas.

There must have been some at Sparta who were aware of the difficulties a campaign in northern Greece would pose. Though they had been called out every year from 394 to 385 the allies were not under any manpower strain. During those years, service for the allies occurred in or near the Peloponnese and was likely seasonal. Additionally, the casualty rate during the Corinthian war was low amongst the allies. Further, the hoplite farmer expected to be called out every year for battle.¹⁸³ He also expected to return home in time for the harvest. The allies were not currently strained but they certainly *could* be if forced to serve at Olynthus.

Most men who served as mercenaries were light troops or peltasts.¹⁸⁴ This is probably because of issues regarding the purchase of equipment. Rarely do we hear of state supplied military equipment. The mercenaries were almost certainly required to provide their own. Equipment for the peltast was far cheaper than that for the hoplite. Service as a peltast was also a job opportunity for the landless poor.

There certainly were hoplite mercenaries but these were undoubtedly limited. There were few men who could afford both the panoply of the hoplite as well as the time away from home which might be required of a mercenary. Unfortunately we have no idea how the mercenaries were recruited or what percentage of the force they made up. We know only that the force reached its prescribed total before setting out.

¹⁸³ Hansen, *Western Way of War* 89.

¹⁸⁴ Millender, "Spartan Mercenary" 254.

In 382, the majority of the advance force set out. A small portion of the force under Phoebidas, the brother of Eudamidas set out later. Phoebidas' mission was ostensibly to join his force with that of his brother. While Phoebidas was camped near Thebes, en route to Olynthus, Leontiades the Theban approached him. Leontiades was one of two Polemarchs at Thebes and represented a pro-Spartan faction. The other polemarch, Ismenias was steadfastly anti-Spartan. According to Xenophon, Leontiades approached Phoebidas and offered to open the gates of Thebes to him so he might seize the Theban citadel or Cadmea. With troops inside the Cadmea, the Spartans could depose Ismenias and place Leontiades' pro-Spartan faction in control of Thebes. In exchange, Leontiades promised his faction would be docile and wholly supportive of Spartan policy. Phoebidas agreed. The plan worked to perfection. Ismenias was imprisoned and later executed. 300 other anti-Spartans fled into exile. Leontiades then set up a narrow pro-Spartan oligarchy.¹⁸⁵

Diodorus disagrees with Xenophon's argument that Phoebidas acted on his own. He suggests that Phoebidas was acting on secret orders from Agesilaus.¹⁸⁶ Buckler agrees with Diodorus citing that Phoebidas took a substantial detour from the route to go to Thebes.¹⁸⁷ Xenophon actually supports this argument by acknowledging that Leontiades only came to Phoebidas when the Spartan troops were already encamped around Thebes.¹⁸⁸

The circumstances of the taking of Thebes further support Diodorus. It is highly unlikely that the coordination between Leontiades and Phoebidas occurred in such a short

¹⁸⁵ Xenophon 5.2.33.

¹⁸⁶ Diodorus 15.20.2.

¹⁸⁷ John Buckler, *The Theban Hegemony 371-362 BC* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980) 12.

¹⁸⁸ Xenophon 5.2.21.

span of time. Agesilaus almost certainly was planning the event secretly in advance with Leontiades. Coordinating the capture of a city by deceit would take significant planning.

Phoebidas' command is also something of an oddity and leads us to believe seizing the Cadmea was part of his mission. Why would a small portion of an advance force leave separately unless they had a separate mission? Phoebidas did not command a specific contingent of cavalry or light infantry: his forces were part of the regular force.

Agesilaus' response to Phoebidas' action also suggests he had knowledge of the event. When the Spartans heard of Phoebidas' deed even they were outraged by the egregious disregard for Theban sovereignty and demanded Phoebidas be punished and the garrison withdrawn. Hamilton emphasizes that the Spartan anger was directed at Phoebidas not because he had committed an immoral act but he had acted without *official* approval.¹⁸⁹ Hamilton suggests that in reading the account in this manner, we see that Xenophon does not contradict Diodorus.¹⁹⁰ Xenophon's avoidance of mentioning Agesilaus directly in concert with Phoebidas' actions may be a clever way of keeping the narrative accurate without implicating the king.

Agesilaus however was unquestionably responsible for the action that followed. He spoke with great enthusiasm for Phoebidas arguing that he had done a great service to Sparta by removing a hostile government from power.¹⁹¹ In what almost seems like a rehearsed event, Leontiades who had "conveniently" just arrived at Sparta then spoke. His speech in which he promised total submission to Sparta in exchange for continued support was enough to convince the Spartans to retain the garrison on the Cadmea. It is doubtful that Leontiades' speech alone convinced the Spartans to lend their support to the

¹⁸⁹ Hamilton, Agesilaus 146.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ Xenophon 5.2.23.

garrison when they had previously been so opposed. Undoubtedly, the influence and power of Agesilaus prevailed on them.

Cawkwell further supports the idea that Agesilaus had planned for Phoebidas' actions, though he argues that it was not foolish and reactionary adventurism of Agesilaus but actually a sort of *realpolitik*.¹⁹² Cawkwell suggests that Sparta could not tolerate a powerful Theban led Boeotian Federation in central Greece. Yet, the Thebes of 382 was not the Thebes of 395. Cawkwell acknowledges that even in 395, there is no evidence that Thebes intended to expand the Boeotian Federation beyond Boeotia.¹⁹³ In 382, Thebes was certainly no great friend of Sparta but there is no evidence to suggest that the Thebans even had designs on reforming the Boeotian Federation. In fact, Thebes of 382 seemed to accept the current Spartan domination, offering only the most passive of resistance such as not supplying manpower for Sparta's wars.¹⁹⁴

The episode at Thebes clearly implicates Agesilaus even if we have no direct evidence. Leontiades was close with Agesilaus and we know that the king would go to great lengths to help his foreign friends come to power and change the constitution of their native poleis.¹⁹⁵ As with the attack on Mantinea, there was little justification but some minute strategic reasoning for the seizure of the Cadmea. This very limited strategic logic was more than enough for Agesilaus to start wars and create enemies where there none were to be found.

If there was an "Agesilaus Doctrine" it was represented perfectly by Agesilaus response to the event. He saw a "hostile" polis at Thebes. Hostility in Agesilaus' mind

¹⁹² Cawkwell, "Agesilaus and Sparta" 82.

¹⁹³ Cawkwell, "Agesilaus and Sparta" 81.

¹⁹⁴ Harold M. Hack. Thebes and the Spartan Hegemony, 386-382 B.C. *The American Journal of Philology* Vol. 99, No. 2 (Summer, 1978), 210.

¹⁹⁵ Plutarch Agesilaus 5.

was any opposition to Spartan policy. His response was to eliminate the hostile government and replace it with one he preferred without regard to logistics or popular consideration.

The “Agesilaus Doctrine” also shows a blatant disregard for history. The Spartan actions from 404-403 were incredibly similar to the events taking place from 385-382. Impose narrow oligarchies, mistreat allies, ignore Greek popular opinion, and become involved in naval war. By 382 Sparta had achieved three of these with the fourth yet to come. The Spartan actions from 404-403 had brought on the Corinthian War, the tide of which only turned Sparta due to Persian intervention. Sparta had learned at Athens in 404-403 something that poleis and nations learned throughout history: setting up a puppet government works only as long as there is substantial military power to back it. In supporting Phoebidas, Agesilaus either had no understanding or a great misunderstanding of long-term policy.

In 382, the 10,000-man force finally set out to Olynthus under the command of Teleutias.¹⁹⁶ The exact Spartan contribution to the force is uncertain, though we know from Xenophon that they “sent out their full contingent.”¹⁹⁷ We know that during the Boeotian War of the 370s, Sparta supplied roughly 15-20% of the army. Assuming a similar contribution, (the Peloponnesian league reorganization of 379/378 was probably as Cartledge suggests, geared towards properly incorporating the all the available allied manpower.¹⁹⁸) there were probably around 2,000 men from Laconia. Neither Xenophon nor Diodorus provide any further insight into the composition of the Spartan force, nor do

¹⁹⁶ Xenophon 5.2.32.

¹⁹⁷ Xenophon 5.2.36. (Warner)

¹⁹⁸ Cartledge, Agesilaus 272.

they make any mention of Spartiates as participating in the expedition to Olynthus. This is unsurprising, as we know Spartiates at least in any substantial number were not sent on imperial expeditions. The men who made up the Spartan contingent were probably Perioikoi as will be shown later in this chapter.

Arriving at Olynthus in the summer, Teleutias force, now including cavalry from Macedonia and Elimia engaged the Olynthian cavalry outside the walls of Olynthus. In the ensuing battle the Spartan force sustained many casualties but drove back the Olynthians with the help of the Elimian cavalry.¹⁹⁹ The battle was not a decisive victory for the Spartans. In fact Diodorus calls it a draw.²⁰⁰ Probably due to the superiority of the Olynthian cavalry, the Spartans were unwilling to attempt a siege of Olynthus and withdrew. They nonetheless continued to raid the Olynthian countryside.

The Spartan force stayed in northern Greece throughout 382. The next year, the Olynthians made the first move, launching a raid on Apollonia. The Spartans responded by sending cavalry to protect their allies. In the brief skirmish that followed, the allied Elimian cavalry drove off the Olynthians killing 80 in the process. After this skirmish, we hear from Xenophon that “the Olynthians only cultivated a very small portion of their land.”²⁰¹ The cavalry skirmish had done enough to damage to confine the Olynthian cavalry to the city. As Hansen notes, chopping down trees was not easy especially when there were cavalry patrols. For Teleutias to have such success in ravaging the land, the Olynthian cavalry could doubtfully have caused much harassment to him. Teleutias then brought his forces back to Olynthus to further ravage.

¹⁹⁹ Xenophon 5.2.32.

²⁰⁰ Diodorus 15.22.2.

²⁰¹ Xenophon 5.3.3. (Warner)

At Olynthus however, Teleutias would allow emotion to cloud his decision-making. When the Spartans arrived near Olynthus, the Olynthian cavalry began to harass them. Teleutias was according to Xenophon enraged at the audacity of the Olynthians and ordered his light infantry to drive them off. The Olynthians slowly withdrew luring the impetuous peltasts to follow them across a river which ran in front of the Olynthian Walls. As soon as the peltasts crossed the river and were away from the main body of Teleutias' troops, the Olynthians turned on them, killing many including the commander of peltasts. Teleutias, now even more enraged, ordered the entire army to attack the Olynthian cavalry. The Spartan force, however, came too close to the walls and was attacked by missile fire, driving them into a confused withdrawal. The Olynthians seized the moment and counterattacked with all their cavalry, light infantry, and hoplites. The attackers led by the Olynthian shock cavalry drove into the disorganized Spartan lines, killing many including Teleutias and causing a rout of the entire force.²⁰²

Diodorus states that there were 1200 casualties.²⁰³ This number, however, is far too low when taking into account the circumstances. Xenophon states that the army ceased to be an effective force. The calamity was so great that Xenophon even includes a brief metaphor of morality, something unusual for him.²⁰⁴

So why dispute Diodorus? The battle at Olynthus was highly unusual for the Peloponnesians because of the effectiveness of the Olynthian cavalry. The lightly armed cavalry in southern Greece, though increasing in importance, was not expected to be the deciding factor in a hoplite battle.

²⁰² Xenophon 5.3.4-6.

²⁰³ Diodorus 15.21.2.

²⁰⁴ Xenophon 5.3.6.

In northern Greece however, the role of cavalry was decidedly different. Cavalry in this region was heavily armed and armored and *did* play the deciding role in battle. When the ambassadors from Acanthus and Apollonia arrived at Sparta to warn of Olynthus, they warned especially of the growing Olynthian cavalry.

We know from Xenophon that the Macedonians had heavy cavalry. In order for the Olynthians to have success against Macedon (they did) they must have had heavy cavalry of their own to counter the Macedonian squadrons. Further evidence of Olynthian heavy cavalry comes from Xenophon's mention of them in a "close order" formation.²⁰⁵ The use of a "close order" formation is used by Xenophon to only to describe the heavy Macedonian Cavalry and the phalanx, which was also heavily armored and designed for shock. We also hear of the cavalry attacking at "full gallop" implying a charge, something not accustomed for light cavalry. The use of "full gallop" for the heavy shock cavalry can be paralleled to the "on the run" for the heavy infantry. The purpose of attacking "on the run" for heavy infantry was for shock value, which we know could be effective. Hansen notes a particularly successful charge at the battle of Coronea in 394, where the Argives broke from the shock alone.²⁰⁶

Soldiers from southern Greece be they hoplites or peltasts were entirely unaccustomed to shock cavalry. When the Olynthian heavy squadron crashed into the disorganized Greek lines at "full gallop" the Greeks totally collapsed and fled.²⁰⁷ In a normal Greek battle, after the line collapsed, the pursuit phase would begin where the victorious contingent would drive the defeated troops from the field. The defeated would fall back to their camp or another defensible position. Casualties were limited by the

²⁰⁵ Xenophon 5.2.32.

²⁰⁶ Hansen, *Western Way of War* 141.

²⁰⁷ Xenophon 5.3.6.

close proximity of defensible positions, as well as the limited speed and endurance of the heavily armed pursuers. Additionally, the pursuers usually retained their formation, as they would often have to wheel around to face another enemy contingent.

The southern Greek battle traditions did not occur at Olynthus. The nearest defensible position was the city of Potidaea, 6 miles away. In southern Greek battle tradition this would not be a problem. Victorious hoplites would not only take themselves out of the battle by pursuing for such a distance even if their heavy armor and limited endurance allowed them.

In southern Greece, cavalry did play an important role in battle. They were used for skirmishing and chasing down fleeing troops. The light cavalry of southern Greece however would be far from the clash of hoplites. As a result, they would not arrive on the battlefield at the moment the line collapsed. Further, the light cavalry did not fight in a tight formation and probably pursued the fleeing men individually going for the most vulnerable. By the time the light cavalry arrived on the battlefield, some if not most of the defeated troops would have reordered themselves into small groups for the withdrawal. The light cavalry would be certain to avoid these pockets of resistance. This could further explain the low casualty rate of Greek battles: 14% for the defeated army of which 9% were killed during the retreat.

At Olynthus, the heavy cavalry, having broken the line would be able to follow immediately in the pursuit. They were not limited by heavy armor, endurance, or distance to ride to the enemy. They could easily kill many of the fleeing Greeks. Xenophon writes that the defeated army scattered “most to Potidaea, some to Apollonia, some to Spartolus,

and some to Acanthus.”²⁰⁸ Such a flight shows the level to which order completely broke down. This level of disorder was probably in large part due to the success of the Olynthian cavalry.

So what of the actual casualties? Diodorus’ 1200 represents 12% or about the normal casualty rate for a defeated force in southern Greek battle. Diodorus, not having specific knowledge of the casualty rate may have plugged in the average casualty rate of a defeated Greek army to arrive at his conclusion. The battle at Olynthus, as noted above was anything but normal for the southern Greeks. Xenophon states only: “the army ceased to be an effective force.”²⁰⁹ Xenophon’s statement gives a clue that the casualties suffered may have been especially high amongst the hoplites. Xenophon like all Greeks of his time considered hoplites to be the most important part of any army. Whenever Xenophon refers to the strength of an army, he is always meticulous in sighting the specific number of hoplites and pays far less credence to the light troops. In stating that the army ceased to be an effective force, Xenophon is probably referring to the destruction of the hoplites. The losses were especially significant in the effect on the allies and probably a part of the cause of the Peloponnesian League reorganization of 378

In response to the disaster the Spartans sent out another army. This army was under the command of Agesipolis and a 30-spartiate staff officer corps. The make-up of the army gives significant insight into the manpower situation in the Peloponnesian league. Xenophon is clear that every contingent to Agesipolis’ army was volunteer. The Spartan contingent was opened to members of society who traditionally did not serve in

²⁰⁸ Xenophon 5.2.32. (Warner)

²⁰⁹ Xenophon 5.3.5. (Warner)

the army. Xenophon writes that the force from Sparta consisted of “the best of the Perioikoi,” bastard sons of Spartiates, and Trophimoi or foreigners who had gone through the agoge.²¹⁰ The Perioikic volunteers are especially interesting. We know from the 2,000-man contingent of Eudamidas that there were some Perioikoi ready to be sent on campaign immediately.²¹¹

Kenwell argues for the existence of a “hoplite class” within Perioikic society, though unfortunately he declines to go into any further detail. There almost certainly was indeed some mechanism by which Sparta levied hoplites from the Perioikoi. It is probable that the Perioikoi “hoplite class” was patterned somewhat on the Spartiate class. The perioikic hoplites who went with Eudamidas as well as those who formed the Spartan contingent (which we know was not Spartiate) that served with Teleutias were probably full time soldiers as were their Spartiate brethren.

Clearly, however, there were also other Perioikoi who did not owe military service to Sparta.²¹² We know this from an interesting pattern in Xenophon’s sentence structure: in describing the Spartans or their allies going on campaign, he always uses a verb representing subservience. The troops are always “ordered, called up, or sent out.” In this instance as well, Xenophon separates them from the 30 Spartiates who were “sent out” with Agesipolis as well as the Perioikic contingent “sent out with Eudamidas”²¹³²¹⁴

The Perioikic volunteers were “of the better class.” The “better class” here refers to their wealth. Only those wealthy Perioikoi would be able to afford armoring

²¹⁰ Xenophon 5.3.9.

²¹¹ Xenophon 5.2.24.

²¹² Nigel M. Kenwell. “From Perioikoi to Poleis.” *Sparta New Perspectives*. (Duckworth: The Classical Press of Wales, 1999) 191.

²¹³ Xenophon 5.3.8.

²¹⁴ Xenophon 5.2.24.

themselves. Xenophon's mention of a "better class" of Perioikic volunteers gives much insight into the role of the Perioikoi. That there was a wealthy class of Perioikoi who were not required to serve proves that Perioikic military service was not based solely on property or wealth. Also, Perioikic service was by no means patterned on that in other poleis, where military service was essentially universal amongst those who could afford it. Clearly, only a portion of Perioikoi served.

It is quite possible that Kenwell's hoplite class may be even more impactful than Kenwell himself proposed. The hoplite class of Perioikoi was more so a "soldier class" in that being a soldier was their profession. These men were full time soldiers in Spartan service and their value man for man was almost equal to the Spartiates. The loss of a trained "soldier class" Perioikic hoplite was almost the same as the loss of a Spartiate.

We know too that the Perioikoi were regarded as near equals to the Spartiates in battle. Plutarch famously relays a story whereby the allies, while in an army camp, complained to Agesilaus that they provided the bulk of the soldiers. Agesilaus wished to dispute this so he divided the men into two groups: one of allies and the other of Lacedaemonians and ordered them all to sit. He then ordered all carpenters, smiths, farmers, builders, potters, and other "men of handicraft" to stand. After running through all possible professions, the entire group of Lacedaemonians remained seated.²¹⁵ When describing the Lacedaemonian contingent in the field, Plutarch as well as Xenophon and Diodorus use the term to mean the joint brigades of Spartiates and Perioikoi. Even if this story was totally made up by Plutarch (neither Xenophon nor Diodorus makes any mention of it) it shows that both the Spartiates and allies viewed the Perioikoi as full time soldiers equal to the Spartiates.

²¹⁵ Plutarch, Agesilaus 26.

How intertwined were the joint Perioikoi-Spartiate brigades? Figueira's chart of the organization of the Spartan morae implies Perioikoi serving with the Spartans all the way down to the enomotia level.²¹⁶ His chart accounts for each man in the joint mora but does not specify an exact placement of the Perioikoi. Service at the enomotia level is highly unlikely. We know that serving in a Spartan enomotia required a mess contribution, something only expected from Spartiates.

It is probable that the Perioikoi served in their own enomotiai. This would solve the problem of Perioikoi making mess contributions as well as the location of their barracks. We know from Xenophon's remark of Agesilaus sending out riders to "mobilize the Perioikoi" that the Perioikic soldiers did not live in Sparta. If they were in joint enomotiai with the Spartiates, surely they would have to come to Sparta to eat. There were likely messes and possibly even barracks in the Periokic towns where soldiers were concentrated.

Following Figueira's population chart, we also see a decline in Perioikic numbers. Clearly they were not subject to the same socioeconomic factors as the Spartiates as there were wealthy Perioikoi available to volunteer. The Spartans probably recruited the Perioikoi from specific "soldier class" families. It is possible that a certain number of Perioikoi were recruited each year in proportion to the Spartiates graduating the agoge. The Spartans were certainly fearful should the numbers of Periokic soldiers vastly outnumber Spartiates. If the Perioikoi became the supreme military force in Laconia, surely they would demand full political rights as most hoplites throughout Greece did.

²¹⁶ Figueira, "Population Patterns" 212.

In addition to the Spartan contingent, we hear from Xenophon that volunteers from all over Greece came to Agesipolis. Xenophon states that the men who volunteered wished to gain favor with Agesipolis.²¹⁷ We are inclined to believe him as we here of no other circumstance of such a call for volunteers. The Greeks had a methodical approach to war: usually only citizens or mercenaries undertook military service. We know that hoplite mercenaries were probably farmers or other professionals who had military experience and could afford their own armor. These men however were limited as the hoplite was usually called into service by his polis (thus why the Persians desired the Greeks to be at peace so that they could hire hoplite mercenaries).

In 380, there were few hoplites available in Greece. The hoplites sent to Olynthus had been largely destroyed. The Spartiates, few remaining Perioikic soldiers, and allies were involved in a siege of Phlius. Xenophon mentions that “volunteer contingents” allied cities and Thessalian cavalry joined Agesipolis, as they “wanted to become known to him.”²¹⁸

So what to make of this army? Clearly this was an army of the wealthy, who for any number of reasons were currently not at war. The abundance of cavalry (which only the wealthy could afford) and the Spartan contingents (wealthy Perioikoi, foreigners and bastard sons of Spartans who had the money to go through the agoge) proves this. If the allied contingents were indeed voluntary, (there’s little reason to suspect they were not) likely the rich would be the most apt to volunteer. The wealthy tended to have strongly pro-Spartan views and may have seen the advantages of “becoming known” to one of their kings. Agesilaus had gone to great lengths to help his friends at Mantinea, Thebes,

²¹⁷ Xenophon 5.3.6.

²¹⁸ Xenophon 5.3.9.

and Phlius. The men who volunteered to serve may have hoped or even expected to receive similar Spartan aid.

The Spartans sought out the wealthy to volunteer because they needed hoplites and cavalry. We know that there were survivors from the battle at Olynthus. Most of them were probably light troops who were not at the front line when the Olynthian cavalry broke through. Due to that and the lightweight of their equipment they probably were able to withdraw without sustaining heavy casualties. Agesipolis' new army therefore already had a contingent of light troops and did not need to call for more.

The new army arrived at Olynthus in 380, and took up a strong position outside the city. Agesipolis, however, died soon after and was replaced by Polybiades. Within a year, the Olynthians, starving, surrendered. How did Sparta, just one year after losing essentially their entire force succeed in reducing Olynthus? The answer may be the Spartan ravishing of Olynthian land. Xenophon writes that since 382, the Spartans had totally ravaged the Olynthian fields.²¹⁹ One of Teleutias' objectives in his fateful second attack on Olynthus was to destroy any remaining timber. While Sparta had lost an army, she had succeeded in economic warfare. There was a Spartan army in ravaging Olynthian territory and preventing the planting or cultivating of crops for three straight years. Though the Olynthians had won a battle, likely in the summer of 381, their crops had already been destroyed and the Spartans probably arrived with a new army in the summer of 380 before the Olynthians could harvest their crops. Sparta was able to keep them in an essential state of siege. The Olynthians had not fully harvested their crops for three years. Without a substantial navy to import grain, the Olynthians were forced to surrender.

²¹⁹ Xenophon 5.3.2.

The terms of the surrender were unusually light: entrance into the Spartan alliance and disbandment of the Olynthian federation. No Spartan garrison or narrow oligarchy was to be imposed. Why such lenient treatment? The manpower situation at Sparta was desperate but there was a large non-Spartiate army in possession of Olynthus. Even if the Spartans were wary of the volunteers, they certainly had enough paid soldiers (survivors of the first battle) to sustain a garrison. Political reasons may explain the reason for the lenient settlement.

Unlike the campaign against Mantinea or the action at Thebes, we hear of no personal connection, exiles, or democrats at Olynthus. The Olynthians may have been “good oligarchs” who had done nothing to cause the Spartans to wish to change their government. Further, the most prominent regime changer, Agesilaus was on campaign against Phlius when the Olynthian embassy of surrender arrived at Sparta. Without Agesilaus to demand the installation of a garrison, it is doubtful that the ephors, even if a majority of them were from Agesilaus’ faction, would have seen reason to impose it. Garrisons cost money to sustain and Sparta had little.

The campaign against Phlius, launched in 380, was personal for Agesilaus. The former oligarchic exiles, who had returned after the Corinthian war, complained to Sparta that they were being treated unfairly. The government of Phlius had refused their demand that an impartial non-Phliasian court hear their grievances (Xenophon does not say what the grievances were). Upon hearing their story, Agesilaus launched an invasion of Phlius. Not surprisingly, he had a close relationship with many of the exiles.²²⁰

²²⁰ Xenophon 5.3.7.

The ephors called out the ban, but what troops did they have available besides the *morae*? Xenophon is clear that there were allies present.²²¹ Yet it was probably not a substantial force. Many of the allied hoplites had been slaughtered at Olynthus and it is unrealistic to think that even Sparta would demand they send all their remaining forces to Phlius. We know also that there were mercenaries present though their numbers and type are uncertain. Most telling in regard to the manpower situation is that Sparta armed 1,000 Phliasian exiles.²²²

Cawkwell argues that at least some of the 1,000 had been through the *agoge* and were highly motivated to fight.²²³ If this were true, however, then we would certainly hear of the exiles voluntarily joining in the fight. Further, it is doubtful that there were 1,000 exiles out of a total Phliasian population of 5,000. Reading Xenophon closely, however, we see that Agesilaus told the exiles to recruit men.²²⁴ Cawkwell is probably correct in that the exiles were vehemently pro-Spartan and had gone through the *agoge*. Yet these men were probably far too few to make any meaningful military contribution. Agesilaus in desperation for manpower, probably told the exiles to spend their own money recruiting, equipping, and training men (who he says are family and friends) for battle. Essentially, Agesilaus had the Phliasian exiles funding his policies. The Phliasian exiles call into service notably happened after the Spartans called out the ban. Once the army formed, Agesilaus probably realized it was not large enough to effectively besiege Phlius. The extra 1,000 men may have been the turning point. After they joined the

²²¹ Xenophon 5.3.14.

²²² Xenophon 5.3.10.

²²³ Cawkwell, "Agesilaus and Sparta" 73.

²²⁴ Xenophon 5.3.16.

Spartans, Agesilaus was able to tighten the siege and finally starve Phlius into surrender. The entire campaign took 20 months.²²⁵

Xenophon makes it clear that Agesilaus was extremely powerful at this time. Due to his influence the ephors, they allowed him to personally impose a settlement on the Phliasian. Agesilaus created a board of 100, 50 from the exiles and 50 from people in Phlius who almost certainly were of the oligarchic faction, to decide upon a new constitution. A Spartan garrison, which we know was made up of mercenaries due to Agesilaus leaving “six months pay”, remained at Phlius to support the new government.²²⁶

The war against Phlius was not popular in Sparta let alone Greece. Some Spartans famously said: “that for the sake of a few individuals, they were making themselves hated by a city of more than 5,000 men.”²²⁷ Even the Spartans saw the overriding foolishness of Agesilaus’ actions. The war had absolutely no strategic purpose. In Agesilaus’ policies, personal and emotional feelings far outweighed strategic considerations.

²²⁵ Xenophon 5.3.14.

²²⁶ Xenophon 5.3.14.

²²⁷ Xenophon 5.3.16.

Chapter 7

At the close of 380, Sparta, according to Xenophon was master of Greece. Events within the next few months would show the fragile nature and poor foresight inherent in Sparta's expansionist policies. Thebes and Athens, the poleis that had previously represented the greatest threat to Sparta, would rise once again. Spartan policies were directly responsible for their ascent and hostile actions.

In the winter of 380, a group of Theban exiles operating from Athens and coordinating with anti-Spartan elements within Thebes itself, managed to sneak into the city. In a coordinated nighttime assault, the exiles killed Leontiades and the leading pro-Spartan oligarchs.

Thebes awoke the next day to find the hated party of Leontiades eliminated. The new government rallied the people to take up arms and besiege the 1500-man Spartan garrison on the Cadmea.²²⁸ Xenophon acknowledges that the new government had little difficulty in rallying the Theban people to their cause.²²⁹ Even the Theban cavalry, almost certainly composed of wealthy individuals with pro-Spartan leanings, "came running out quickly with their arms to join the revolt."²³⁰ Leontiades' rule had clearly alienated the members of society who traditionally supported oligarchy. His close ties with Sparta and puppet status were no doubt highly unpopular with almost all Thebans regardless of class.

Plutarch refers to the "revolution" at Thebes as a "sister" to the actions of Thrasybulus.²³¹ There were certainly similarities in the manner in which the revolutions

²²⁸ Plutarch Pelopidas 13. Diodorus 15.25.2.

²²⁹ Xenophon 5.4.9.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Plutarch Pelopidas 13

were carried out, yet the greatest commonality between the two events was that they were against Sparta. One might surmise that once a brutal and unpopular oligarchy was overthrown, Sparta would not reattempt the feat without a significant garrison. Not only did Sparta do such but also acted in a far more egregious manner at Thebes than she had the hindsight of Athens at 403.

After the Peloponnesian War, Sparta, in imposing a narrow oligarchy on a defeated enemy was not acting in an especially abnormal or aggressive manner. Additionally, the anti-democratic faction at Athens was not only oligarchic but pro-Spartan as well. Thrasybulus' revolution and the political strife that followed occurred mostly due to the excessive brutality of the thirty and the narrowness of their oligarchy.

Unlike the thirty at Athens, Sparta had not replaced one form of government for another at Thebes. While we are unsure of the specific workings of the Theban government, we know it was oligarchic. Buckler states that many have incorrectly identified the faction of Ismenias as democratic.²³² Yet, as Buckler notes, Ismenias rose to prominence during the latter stages of the Peloponnesian War when Thebes was an oligarchy.²³³ Buckler further sites as evidence the fact that Ismenias never put forth any legislation that was remotely democratic.²³⁴ Prior to 382, Thebes remained firmly oligarchic albeit with two factions: pro-Spartan and anti-Spartan.²³⁵ Hack refers to the anti-Spartan faction as pro-Athenian but this is not necessarily the case. The policies of Ismenias were first and foremost directed against Sparta rather than towards Athens. If this were the case, surely we would hear of some Theban-Athenian cooperation in the

²³² Buckler, *The Theban Hegemony* 44.

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ Hack, "Thebes and the Spartan Hegemony" 212.

380s following the peace of Antalkidas. In fact, Thebes and Athens were for the better part of the 4th and 5th centuries at odds, often over the city of Plataea.²³⁶ The only occasions in which Thebes and Athens actually did cooperate were in opposition to Sparta. Buckler even goes as far as to declare Thebans joining of the Athenian led second sea league in 377 as an “unlikely alliance.”²³⁷ In fact it seems only opposition to Sparta could bring Thebes and Athens together.

During the Corinthian War, political strife was generally centered upon anti-Spartan and pro-Spartan factions. In every case that we hear of, the anti-Spartan factions were democratic and the pro-Spartan factions oligarchic. Therefore, it is easy to see why support of anti-Spartan faction and support of democracy came to be viewed as one and the same.

In the aftermath of the Corinthian War, Sparta made clear that it would not tolerate democracies, even if they took a pro-Spartan policy. The Spartans too would not accept oligarchies either should they refused to follow Spartan leadership. In fact, the only government acceptable to the Spartans during this period was a narrow oligarchy that was fervently pro-Spartan. The installation of the Spartan garrison on the Cadmea was a symbol of foreign occupation that probably galvanized the already existing anti-Spartan feeling that permeated all strata of society into a large-scale patriotic response. Also, none of the ancient sources mention any Theban resistance to the revolutionaries confirming they had very little support outside of the Spartan garrison. Due to the Spartan involvement, the faction of Leontiades was probably no longer seen as another political club with a certain viewpoint on how foreign policy should be conducted, but the

²³⁶ Hack, “Thebes and the Spartan Hegemony” 218.

²³⁷ Buckler, The Theban Hegemony 18.

traitorous instrument of a foreign government. Sparta's actions had already turned all democracies into enemies, now Agesilaus made clear that Sparta would tolerate not even moderate oligarchies.

The ancient sources disagree on events immediately following the siege of the Cadmea, most notably the Athenian role. Diodorus gives the greatest support for a major Athenian role in the liberation of the Cadmea. He suggests that the Thebans appealed to Athens for assistance citing Theban support for the Athenian exiles during the revolt against the thirty tyrants.²³⁸ The Athenians then responded by sending a force of 5,000 men to Thebes to assist in the siege of the Cadmea. Such an action would be tantamount to an act of war and Diodorus himself writes that in the next year (378) Athens and Sparta had been at peace since 386.²³⁹ Diodorus as he often does may be confusing the timing of events. The 5,000 men Athens sent to Thebes was probably in the next year after Athens had declared war on Sparta.

Xenophon also writes of an Athenian role, albeit far more limited than Diodorus. He suggests the impetus for the intervention was not state sponsored but two generals acting on their own accord. He cites as evidence that Athens later punished the two generals who had led the expedition in support of Thebes.²⁴⁰ As Warner notes however, Chabrias, who commanded Athenian peltasts involved in lending support to Thebes was not punished lending support to the possibility that the intervention was state sponsored or at least somewhat state condoned.²⁴¹

²³⁸ Diodorus 15.26.1.

²³⁹ Diodorus 15.29.5.

²⁴⁰ Xenophon 5.4.19.

²⁴¹ Warner, in note to Xenophon 5.4.19.

Hamilton believes Xenophon's version as most probable citing the fact that Xenophon would have every reason to implicate Athens.²⁴² Hamilton argues that if Athens had sent official aid to Thebes, then the Sphodrias raid would be entirely justifiable and the two poleis would have probably already broken off relations.²⁴³ Both Xenophon and Diodorus are in agreement the Sphodrias raid was the *casus belli* between Athens and Sparta.

Xenophon's version of events also fits in well with the general Athenian *modus operandi* during the 380s. Athens had no intention of openly challenging Sparta. Cartledge declares that Athens was not hostile to Sparta before the Sphodrias incident.²⁴⁴ While Athens indeed was not hostile to Sparta she certainly was no *laconizer* either. The Athenians, since the king's peace had embarked on a cautious foreign policy, the long-term goal of which to regain their empire and hegemony of Greece. In the short term, Athens had no intent to challenge Sparta directly. This alliance was carefully constructed so as not to violate the autonomy clause in the king's peace.²⁴⁵

Kallet-Marx, however disagrees with the notion that the Athenian aid to Thebes was unofficial. He cites the fact that Athens would have immediately disavowed the action had it not been official.²⁴⁶ Kallet-Marx suggests that the Athenians were motivated to intervene, as they were fearful Sparta and diplomatic isolation. We must acknowledge that there is uncertainty surrounding the trial of the two generals involved in aiding Thebes. Kallet-Marx argues that the generals may have been called to trial as a means for

²⁴² Hamilton *Agésilas* 162.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ Cartledge, *The Spartans* 170.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ Robert Morstein Kallet-Marx *Athens, Thebes, and the Foundation of the Second Athenian League* *Classical Antiquity* Vol. 4, No. 2 (Oct., 1985), 142.

Athens to deny official involvement in the affair.²⁴⁷ It is clear, that the Athenians sanctioned the generals as a response to the Spartan invasion of Boeotia. The uncertainty surrounding the time in between the Athenian aid to Thebes and the trial however is not an affirmation of official Athenian assistance. If anything, the entire episode suggests a lack of cohesion in Athenian policy.

There certainly was some type of Athenian aid to the Theban revolutionaries as well as sympathy for their cause. The Athenian force was however, doubtfully the 5,000 man state sanctioned army Diodorus claims. It would be difficult for the Athenians to successfully deny knowledge of a force of such size. Further, the Athenians had to be aware that official aid to Thebes could lead to war Sparta, which as we know from the trial, was not desired.

Further complicating matters is the issue of Chabrias' peltasts who occupied the border fort at Eleutherae.²⁴⁸ We know Chabrias was not sanctioned for this action, as he was heavily involved in Athenian politics throughout the 370s.

In the middle of the winter in 379, Cleombrotus' army, 10,000 strong came upon Chabrias force stationed at Eleutherae. We are unsure when Chabrias arrived but can assume it had been recent. Diodorus states that Chabrias had been recalled from Egypt *after* the liberation of the Cadmea as part of an Athenian policy of placating the Persians.²⁴⁹ Again, Diodorus, timeline is questionable. He writes that Athens had already entered into an alliance with Thebes but was at the same time still at peace with Sparta. Almost certainly, the Theban-Athenian alliance was not solidified until after the Sphodrias raid.

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Hamilton, Agesilaus 165.

²⁴⁹ Diodorus 15.29.4.

As noted above, there did however seem to be a tacit understanding between Athens and Thebes in 379. If Chabrias' deployment was indeed state sponsored (it almost certainly was) it raises the question as to what exactly Chabrias' purpose was. Xenophon states that he was "guarding the road" which also happened to be the best route into Thebes,²⁵⁰ Kallet-Marx doubts that the Thebans would rely on Chabrias to block this route, unless there was an official alliance and the two poleis were acting in unison.²⁵¹ If there were indeed some type of mutual defense accord between the Thebans and Athenians, then surely the Athenians would expect war with Sparta. Chabrias' position as a blocking force only serves to further complicate matters relating to the sudden change in Athenian policy.

When Cleombrotus' army finally arrived in Boeotia they did essentially nothing and remained in camp for sixteen days before returning to Sparta. During this time, they did no damage to Theban territory. The Athenians, however, repudiated their Theban ties and sanctioned the pro-Boeotian party. This odd state of affairs may be explained by a Theban peace offering. The Thebans agreed to rejoin the Peloponnesian league and promised to remain a party to the king's peace.²⁵² Hamilton argues that Cleombrotus' inactivity may have been caused by the Theban peace initiative.²⁵³ The moderate Cleombrotus could have offered a truce while the peace embassy appealed to Sparta.

Hamilton suggests that the Thebans sent a peace embassy due to the fact that the Athenians had abandoned them by repudiating the pro-Boeotian party.²⁵⁴ Xenophon statement about the events is ambiguous. He does say that Athens repudiated the

²⁵⁰ Xenophon 5.4.14. (Warner)

²⁵¹ Kallet-Marx, Athens Thebes 143.

²⁵² Cartledge, The Spartans 166. Hamilton, Agesilaus 166.

²⁵³ Hamilton, Agesilaus 166.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

generals, as they were fearful of the Spartan army though unsurprisingly makes no mention of the Theban peace initiative.²⁵⁵

In implicating the Athenians as the cause of the Thebans peace drive; Hamilton fails to note the cautious Athenian policies of the 380s. Athenian policy towards Sparta in 379 operated on a wait-and-see approach. The Athenians would not act; rather they would react to the situation. Additionally, the Theban-Athenian ties while growing had not yet become an official alliance. The Thebans, perhaps unsure of the Athenian commitment may have sent out peace feelers to Sparta. When the Athenians heard of this, they in turn questioned the Theban commitment and took the safe policy of appeasing Sparta in Central Greece while focusing their attention to the Aegean.

The Theban peace offering may explain the sudden change in Athenian policy. The Athenians as noted by the Sphodrias raid *were* willing to go to war with the Spartans if the circumstances favored them. They may have known of the Theban peace terms, were sure the Spartans would accept, and then might have found *themselves* the target of Cleombrotus' army. The Athenians were probably shocked when the Spartans declined the Theban peace offering. Agesilaus demanded a return to the pre-liberation state of affairs in exchange for peace. He wanted Spartan partisans in charge of Thebes and possibly the reestablishment of the garrison.²⁵⁶ The Thebans could not accept such terms and the two states remained at war.

There is also the question as to why Agesilaus did not lead the invasion. When the Sparta heard of their surrender they immediately dispatched a force to attack Thebes. According to Xenophon, Agesilaus was supposed to lead the force but begged off

²⁵⁵ Xenophon 5.4.19.

²⁵⁶ Cartledge, *The Spartans* 166.

claiming he had the right to decline given his age.²⁵⁷ Xenophon suggests that Agesilaus avoided service as to avoid being implicated in coming “to the help of tyrants.”²⁵⁸ Hamilton agrees with Xenophon but adds that Agesilaus had an internal political objective: implicate Cleombrotus, who probably led an anti-Agesilaus faction, in Agesilaus policies.²⁵⁹

There probably was an internal dimension to Agesilaus’ actions. While Agesilaus may have wished to have Cleombrotus implicated in his policies, such political scheming seems a bit too complex for the shortsighted Agesilaus. Rather, as was the case at Mantinea, Agesilaus was demonstrating his superiority in Sparta by sending Cleombrotus, the junior king, on a mission he (Cleombrotus) was opposed to.

When Cleombrotus withdrew to the Peloponnese, he left Sphodrias in command of a garrison at Thespieae with a third of the troops and money to hire mercenaries.²⁶⁰ Hamilton suggests that Cleombrotus’ anti-Agesilaus feelings led to the abortive invasion of Thebes.²⁶¹ We know Cleombrotus was opposed to Agesilaus policies but it is doubtful that he would openly defy the ephors. Doing so would surely result in some type of punishment. Perhaps Cleombrotus’ objective had not been to subdue Thebes militarily. The Spartans probably hoped that a show of force would bring Thebes to the bargaining table. Here they succeeded but Agesilaus absurd terms prevented any peace.

The military situation as well might have played a role in Cleombrotus’ withdrawal. The Spartan allies had suffered greatly at Olynthus. Calling them out again for a long unpopular campaign against Thebes would certainly serve only to increase

²⁵⁷ Xenophon 5.4.14.

²⁵⁸ Xenophon 5.4.14.

²⁵⁹ Hamilton, Agesilaus 165.

²⁶⁰ Xenophon 5.4.15.

²⁶¹ Hamilton, Agesilaus 166.

their resentment to Sparta. Further, besieging Thebes would certainly take a long time and require a substantial force. Perhaps Cleombrotus' objective was to secure the other Boeotian cities. He did leave a large garrison at Thespieae, though it was doubtfully 10,000 strong as Diodorus suggests.²⁶² We know from Xenophon that the garrison force was one third of the entire invasion force plus mercenaries. A 10,000-man garrison would equate to a 30,000-man invasion force; a doubtful number considering the next year, the invasion force was 18,000. Perhaps Diodorus confused the 10,000-man garrison with the main army. If this is true, then the garrison force would probably be a much more manageable number –perhaps of around 4-5,000, when including mercenaries.

In 378, probably in the spring, an event occurred that would change the course of events in Greece. Sphodrias, the Spartan governor at Thespieae attempted and failed to seize the Piraeus in a night attack. The Athenians demanded Sphodrias be punished for his actions. Both Plutarch and Xenophon suggest that the Thebans convinced Sphodrias to attack Athens, as they did not want to stand-alone against the Spartans.²⁶³²⁶⁴ Diodorus however disagrees and argues that Cleombrotus had given Sphodrias, who was a member of his faction, secret orders for the raid.²⁶⁵

The circumstances around the causality of the Sphodrias raid are very uncertain. Cartledge and Hamilton are in agreement that Sphodrias acted without the consent on Cleombrotus. Buckler believes Diodorus and argues that Cleombrotus was indeed the culprit as he saw Athens as the main enemy of Sparta and wished to direct Spartan

²⁶² Diodorus 15.29.6.

²⁶³ Plutarch Pelopidas 14.

²⁶⁴ Xenophon 5.4.20.

²⁶⁵ Diodorus 15.29.5.

attention to that polis.²⁶⁶ MacDonald also agrees with Diodorus. He cites Sphodrias' actions – the pillaging of Athenian land and the lack of effort to cover up the event as an example that he must have had state support.²⁶⁷ Casting doubt on Buckler as well is the fact that Cleombrotus' faction, of which Sphodrias was a member, was opposed to imperialistic actions. We know from Plutarch that Sphodrias was notoriously reckless.²⁶⁸ We also know that Sphodrias was clearly not especially capable as he was unaware of the distance between Athens and Thespieae. Covering the roughly 40 miles in one day without being detected was all but impossible. Sphodrias' poor judgment lends credence to the possibility that he could have been encouraged to act foolishly. MacDonald's argument is problematic in the sense he assumes that Sphodrias failure to hide his action is immediate cause for Cleombrotus' implication in the affair. If anything Sphodrias' actions after the raid failed suggest he was attempting to save himself. Being so far into Attica when his ruse was discovered, Sphodrias was presented with a *fait accompli*.

The Thebans for their part would have had ample motive to see the Athenians and Spartans at odds. It is quite possible that they encouraged Sphodrias' actions. Overall, however almost all of the blame rested with Sphodrias.

The occurrence of the raid did not spur Athens into war with Sparta. The Athenians probably doubted that Sparta would be so stupid as to order such an action and were certain Sphodrias had acted on his own. Athens demanded only that he be punished for his action. The Spartans responded and privately assured the Athenians that Sphodrias

²⁶⁶ Buckler, *The Theban Hegemony* 17.

²⁶⁷ Alexander MacDonald. "A Note on the Raid of Sphodrias: The Case for Diodoros" *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* Vol. 21, No. 1 (1st Qtr., 1972), 40.

²⁶⁸ Plutarch *Pelopidas* 14.

would indeed be punished.²⁶⁹ Sphodrias was soon called to trial at Sparta. He was so sure of his guilt that he failed to appear. Yet at the trial, he was shockingly pronounced innocent due to the intervention of Agesilaus. The Athenians unsurprisingly declared war.²⁷⁰ Agesilaus actions, which can only be described as utter stupidity, brought Sparta into a two front war it could not win.

Why would Agesilaus make all of Sparta guilty of a foolish deed carried out by one individual? The fact that this deed, which unlike Phoebidas' attack on the Cadmea, provided no strategic advantage to Sparta only serves to heighten the question. Xenophon suggests Agesilaus voted to acquit Sphodrias because his son Archidamus was a lover of Cleonymus, the son of Sphodrias. Archidamus supposedly went to his father to beg for the life of the father of his beloved. Agesilaus accepted the plea of his son. Xenophon further claims that Agesilaus convinced his own faction to vote for acquittal claiming Sphodrias was an honorable man and Sparta needed soldiers like him.²⁷¹

Cartledge suggests acquitting Sphodrias was part of an internal political power play for Agesilaus.²⁷² Sphodrias was in a faction opposed to Agesilaus. Cartledge argues that since Agesilaus was the cause of his acquittal, Sphodrias owed loyalty to the Eurypontid king. Essentially Agesilaus had made an inroad into the opposition. Hamilton agrees with Cartledge though he adds that Agesilaus acted, as he desired to mitigate the opposition Cleombrotus' faction had towards his policies. Hamilton's assertion if true suggests the Agesilaus was ever trying to increase his power. Agesilaus already possessed supreme power at Sparta and he need not be concerned with the small

²⁶⁹ Xenophon 5.4.23.

²⁷⁰ Xenophon 5.4.32-34.

²⁷¹ Xenophon 5.4.32.

²⁷² Paul Cartledge, *Spartan Reflections*. (Los Angeles and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) 66.

opposition. Perhaps, any opposition foreign or domestic was too much for Agesilaus and he felt a need to act in order to remove it. Smith agrees with both Hamilton and Cartledge that internal politics were the reason for Sphodrias' acquittal.²⁷³ Smith however suggests that there was serious opposition to Agesilaus and he acted out of desperation in order to contain it. We know there was opposition to Agesilaus' policies but Smith may overplay it. If the opposition were so great, surely Agesilaus would not have the political power to essentially overturn a guaranteed conviction.

We know that Agesilaus understood power, especially his own. That he was unchallenged and had seen only success (he probably saw the liberation of Thebes as only a minor setback soon to be reversed) may have caused him to believe his own power limitless. He probably did not comprehend that negative consequences could befall his actions.

Prior to Sphodrias trial, most of Sparta was aware acquittal would lead to war with Athens. Whatever Agesilaus' reason for acquittal even he could not be thickheaded enough to be unaware that it would lead to war. The vote for acquittal gives an excellent insight into the thinking of Agesilaus. Perhaps Agesilaus while aware simply was not concerned. In his mind, he could do as he pleased; after all, everything had worked out favorably in the past. Agesilaus believed he would again lead Sparta to victory regardless of the odds. No matter the internal political gamesmanship, nor possibility that Agesilaus acted out of concern for his son or the dwindling Spartiate numbers, there is really no satisfactory explanation that can explain why Agesilaus would embark Sparta on a war she was sure to lose.

²⁷³ R. E. Smith. "The Opposition to Agesilaus' Foreign Policy 394-371 B.C." *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* Vol. 2, No. 3 (1954), 281.

In 378, there was legitimate hatred for the Spartans amongst the Thebans and now the Athenians. The Spartans had occupied the former and launched a naked aggression against the latter. Much of Greece including the Spartan allies were disturbed by Sparta's aggressive policies and were unwilling combatants at best. How would Sparta conduct this war? The Spartiates and perioikic hoplites had dwindled. The allied hoplites were uncertain and unwilling. Further, Sparta would have to fight at sea, an arena that she lacked the resources for. In spite of the odds, Agesilaus embarked Sparta on this course.

Chapter 8

In 378, Sparta reorganized the Peloponnesian league into 10 sections or military districts based upon their expected contributions. We are unsure of the specific demands placed on each district though we have from Diodorus an interesting piece of information regarding the overall composition of the army: Diodorus declares the Spartans set the ratio of one hoplite to two peltasts and four hoplites to one horseman as a means of deciding the specific amount of money poleis who wished to send mercenaries instead of their own contingents were to supply.²⁷⁴ Expanding on Diodorus it is probable that this ratio for pay also was used to determine the specific make up of the entire army. We know that in 378, Agesilaus marched on Thebes at the head of 18,000 men and well as 1,500 cavalry.²⁷⁵ Using Diodorus' ratio there is a perfect fit for the entire force: 4 hoplites for every 1 horseman= 6,000 total hoplites and 2 peltasts for every hoplite = 12,000 peltasts for a total of 18,000 soldiers and 1,500 cavalry. Peltasts, while effective for certain tasks on the battlefield could not be expected to decide the outcome of a battle. That Sparta had to rely so heavily on light troops speaks to the lack of available hoplites and the overall weakness of the Spartan military.

Diodorus also gives insight into the specific Spartan contingent. We know from Xenophon that at the battle of Nemea a mere 16 years earlier the Spartan allies (not including Corinth) contributed 6,500 hoplites.²⁷⁶ Diodorus states the Spartan contingent was five morae of 500 men each plus 600 Sciritae or 3100 total hoplites.²⁷⁷ It is doubtful

²⁷⁴ Diodorus 15.31.2.

²⁷⁵ Diodorus 15.32.1.

²⁷⁶ Xenophon 4.2.16.

²⁷⁷ Diodorus 15.31.2.

that Sparta would deploy five of her six morae.²⁷⁸ Diodorus may have been aware of the total Spartan contingent being around 3,000 and assumed five morae. Sparta probably deployed 4 morae of 512 men, 600 Scritiae, and 300 hippies for a total near 3,000.

The allies including Corinth (who probably owed 3,000 hoplites to the Peloponnesian league, the same number she contributed to the battle of Nemea in 394.) probably owed roughly 9,500 hoplites but chose instead 3,000 hoplites and 12,000 light troops. Why the paucity of hoplites? In almost all of the allied poleis, some form of oligarchy existed of which those who outfitted themselves as hoplites formed the majority of the assembly. Spartan imperialism had alienated all but the most extreme oligarchs. The Peloponnesian hoplite class had lost the will to fight for Sparta. Fearful of reprisal, they would not dare openly enter into opposition but send their prescribed coin rather than themselves. Additionally, hiring hoplite mercenaries for such an unjust cause was difficult. Peltasts, coming from the numerous lower strata of society, probably viewed mercenary service as an opportunity to make money and largely disregarded the political ramifications.

Russell notes as well that almost always, mercenaries were light troops, and that the hoplites that served as mercenaries were the exception to this general rule.²⁷⁹ Millender agrees that mercenaries were usually light troops.²⁸⁰ She adds that Sparta's use of mercenaries allowed for the expansionist polices. Expanding on the use of mercenaries as light troops, we really only see one instance of hoplites being mentioned in connection mercenaries

²⁷⁸ Figueira "Population Patterns" 168.

²⁷⁹ A. G. Russell. "The Greek as a Mercenary Soldier" *Greece & Rome* Vol. 11, No. 33 (May, 1942), 108.

²⁸⁰ Millender. "Spartan mercenary" 250.

In the aftermath of the Sphodrias raid, Thebans joined the budding second sea league, transforming it into a powerful anti-Spartan alliance. The Athenians masterfully seized upon the general anti-Spartan sentiment in Greece to convince other poleis to join the league.²⁸¹ Despite the imperial past of the Athenians, many Greek poleis voluntarily joined.

Hamilton argues that Athenian propaganda was key to the formation of the new league. He argues that certain clauses in the Aristoteles Decree, essentially the charter of the new league, were designed to be specifically anti-Spartan. One clause was especially decisive: “So that the Lacedaemonians shall leave the Greeks free and autonomous.”²⁸² In addition to the autonomy clause there was a promise of no garrisons or constitutional changes, probably the two most hated elements of Spartan policy.

Hamilton also suggests that these clauses were promises from the Athenians that they would not repeat their past imperialistic behavior.²⁸³ The Athenians would indeed have needed to assure their new allies that they were equals and not subjects. Cartledge agrees though he sites as key that the Athenians emphasized a total opposition not to their own imperial past but to the characteristics of present Spartan.²⁸⁴ As noted previously, many political parties were expressly anti-Spartan, suggesting a trend whereby people identified themselves not a democrats or oligarchs (as was generally the case during the fifth century) but in regard to their feelings toward Sparta.

In the summer of 378, Agesilaus invasion force easily crossed into Theban territory. The Theban army joined by an Athenian contingent declined to fight the

²⁸¹ Hamilton, *Agesilaus* 179.

²⁸² Hamilton, *Agesilaus* 180.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁴ Cartledge, *Agesilaus* 376.

numerically superior Spartans, confining the action mostly to skirmishing, raiding, and plundering during which, both sides sustained casualties amongst their cavalry and light troops. According to Xenophon, Agesilaus, after successfully devastating the Theban land, withdrew to Thespieae and then the Peloponnese, leaving Phoebidas in command of the garrison at Thespieae.²⁸⁵

Xenophon however ignores one very crucial event that we hear of from Diodorus.²⁸⁶ In one instance during the campaign, the Theban-Athenian force sallied forth to meet Agesilaus. The allies, under the command of the Athenian Chabrias held the high ground. Chabrias famously ordered his men to stand with their shields resting at their knees, which according to Hamilton was meant as a challenge and insult to Agesilaus.²⁸⁷ The Spartan king shockingly declined battle and proceeded to ravage the land. By not fighting, Hamilton argues, Agesilaus granted the Thebans a strategic and more importantly moral victory.²⁸⁸

It is however unfair to chastise Agesilaus for avoiding battle. The allies held a clear terrain advantage. Even in Agesilaus' time, commanders were certainly aware an uphill frontal assault was extraordinarily foolish. Though Agesilaus greatly lacked strategic ability, he was no fool on the battlefield. The allies (Thebes and Athens) outnumbered and still believing in the Spartan myth of invincibility, probably had no desire to face the Spartans on open ground. Agesilaus therefore was forced to conduct the war in the traditional manner: ravage crops in hopes of obtaining surrender or forcing the enemy to fight.

²⁸⁵ Xenophon 5.4.41.

²⁸⁶ Diodorus 15.33. 2-3.

²⁸⁷ Hamilton Agesilaus 177.

²⁸⁸ Hamilton Agesilaus 175.

The Spartan battle plan was not coordinated with the overall objective. Sparta's goal in this war was to restore their tyrannical partisans at Thebes. Xenophon by avoiding mention of the political objectives tacitly acknowledges this. The Athenians masterfully painted the war as tyranny versus freedom and it is obvious how the average Greek might come to this conclusion in the blatant absence of evidence to the contrary. Sparta wished to control a city that desired only autonomy.

The unjust and unpopular nature of the war would encourage defections from the Spartan allies the longer it went on. Additionally, due to limited citizen numbers, Sparta could not sustain an indefinite war effort as attrition could reduce her Spartiates to dangerously low levels. Sparta's objective caused a victory to be near impossible. Only through a lengthy siege could she come away victorious. As noted above, doing so would be difficult enough against the Thebans alone. Thebes joined with Athens made the proposition essentially impossible. Even a peace treaty with a status quo ante and an independent Thebes was a strategic Spartan defeat.

When Agesilaus withdrew, the Thebans moved against Phoebidas at Thespieae. Phoebidas continually harassed the Thebans with his peltasts. According to Xenophon, the harassment was so constant that the Thebans were essentially unable to maneuver and began to retreat.²⁸⁹ Diodorus agrees with Xenophon though he also mentions a minor skirmish near Thespieae.²⁹⁰

The Theban retreat emboldened Phoebidas who pursued with his entire force. Xenophon suggests that during the retreat, the Thebans cavalry upon reaching an impassable ravine turned to fight. In a desperate last stand, the Thebans charged into the

²⁸⁹ Xenophon 5.4.42.

²⁹⁰ Diodorus 15.33.5.

peltasts at the front of Phoebidas' army. The lightly armed peltasts could not hold their ground against the Theban cavalry charge and fled. Their flight caused a general rout during which Phoebidas and 500 others were killed.²⁹¹

Xenophon attributes the Spartan debacle to unfortunate circumstance: the Thebans cavalry "stumbled" upon an impassable ravine and were forced to turn and fight. They "happened" to catch a few disorganized peltasts who fled in the face of the charge, which caused the whole army to rout. The idea that the Thebans did not know their own territory and came upon the ravine is ludicrous. Diodorus makes no mention of the ravine but instead places blame on Phoebidas suggesting he acted rashly and irresponsibly during the pursuit.²⁹²

To further understand the specific events at Thespieae we must look to Xenophon's description of Phoebidas' troops. The only hoplites Phoebidas had at his disposal were Thespian, while the rest of the troops were peltasts, which Xenophon explicitly connotes as being mercenaries.²⁹³ Sparta's reliance on light troops gives further credence to Diodorus' suggestion of a two to one peltast to hoplite ratio. The fact that the mercenaries were peltasts also suggests a lack of available mercenary or allied hoplites.

Millender notes that Spartan polemarchs were notoriously poor at commanding mercenaries, who were usually peltasts.²⁹⁴ This lends credence to Diodorus' description placing blame for the debacle on Phoebidas. Similar to the events at Olynthus in 381, the peltasts were probably lured away from the main body of troops by the Theban cavalry who then turned, charged, and routed the peltasts. Phoebidas like Teleutias was probably

²⁹¹ Diodorus 15.33.6.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Xenophon 5.4.44.

²⁹⁴ Millender, "Spartan Mercenary" 254.

killed trying to rally the undisciplined troops. Command then broke down and the panic spread to the Thespian hoplites, who declined to stand their ground and fled along with the peltasts.

Hamilton acknowledges that the Theban gains after the battle of Thespieae are uncertain though he argues that the victory emboldened the Thebans and caused the Spartans to make plans for another campaign against Boeotia the following spring.²⁹⁵ It is clear from Xenophon that the Thebans were indeed emboldened. They began to lend significant assistance to the democratic anti-Spartan parties in the other Boeotian cities where pro-Spartan oligarchies had been set up.²⁹⁶ After highlighting the threat, Xenophon chides the Spartans who responded only by sending one mora to Thespieae to reinforce the garrison.²⁹⁷

The greatest effect of the battle at Thespieae may have indeed been as a morale booster. Though there were no defections of the Spartan controlled Boeotian cities that we know of in 378, the stubborn Theban defense may have inspired the other Boeotian cities. Buckler suggests that the Boeotian population looked towards Thebes as a liberator due to the presence of Spartan garrisons.²⁹⁸ Yet why now? The return of the exiled anti-Spartan parties may be the cause. After Thespieae, anti-Spartan sentiment was held in check due to the exile or death of most of the anti-Spartan leadership. The return of these men probably reignited hatred for Sparta and may explain why Xenophon was disappointed that Sparta responded to this challenge by sending only one mora. To

²⁹⁵ Hamilton, *Agesilaus* 178.

²⁹⁶ Xenophon 5.4.46.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁸ Buckler, *The Theban Hegemony* 21.

control all of Boeotia, Sparta needed more men for her garrisons. Even the mora was unable to prevent stasis from occurring at Thespieae the following year.

In the spring of 377, Agesilaus again invaded Boeotia ostensibly with the purpose of bringing Thebes to her knees. Hamilton casts doubt on this and suggests that Agesilaus invasion was in response to the stasis occurring in the Boeotian cities. Hamilton's argument is intriguing though it implies a strategic pragmatism and flexibility, traits foreign to Agesilaus. Also casting doubt on Hamilton's argument is Agesilaus tactical maneuvers. Rather than try to aid the Spartan partisans in the Boeotian cities, he again marched toward Thebes to ravage her crops.

As in 378, the Theban army occupied a strong position that Agesilaus chose not to assault. Xenophon's description of what followed is so heavily pro-Agesilaus that we may question the possibility of exaggeration. He suggests that Agesilaus by-passed the Theban position to march upon the city of Thebes itself. This action caused the Thebans to withdraw from their position as they were in fear of their undefended city. It is extremely doubtful that the action unfolded exactly as Xenophon described it. The Thebans almost certainly would not be so foolish as to leave a path open to an undefended city.

Diodorus describes the Thebans as sallying forth from their city, suggesting there were defenders in the city.²⁹⁹ Xenophon writes that during the march towards Thebes, the Spartans were constantly harassed by spears thrown from the heights above the main path.³⁰⁰ Xenophon's description appears to speak of light troops, as it is doubtful that hoplites would throw away their primary weapon. Perhaps the Thebans had two forces:

²⁹⁹ Diodorus 15.34.3.

³⁰⁰ Xenophon 5.4.32.

light troops deployed to a strong defensive position on the heights and hoplites inside the city.

Xenophon describes a running battle for “the heights” occupied by troops who were probably Theban peltasts. The back and forth battle ended when the peltasts near to the wall turned and forced the Spartan back. This is probably the point described by Diodorus where the Thebans (probably hoplites) came out from the city to support the light troops. When the Thebans sallied from their city, Agesilaus withdrew and the Thebans erected a trophy of victory, which Xenophon unsurprisingly mocks.³⁰¹ Agesilaus then withdrew to Thespieae.

It is tempting to suggest, as Xenophon would probably wish us to believe, that the end of campaigning season was the cause for Agesilaus withdrawal from Boeotia. Yet the fact that Agesilaus withdrew immediately after the battle is too coincidental. Diodorus writes that the Spartans withdrew after “seeing the multitude of men streaming down from the city.”³⁰² It is possible that the paucity of hoplites forced the withdrawal. Equipped largely with light troops, Agesilaus could not hope to win a battle and so withdrew to regroup and attempt to levy more hoplites for the next year’s campaign.

In addition to the military situation not favoring the Spartans, there was also stasis in Thespieae, a key Spartan ally in Boeotia. According to Xenophon Agesilaus “found the citizens of Thespieae in a state of violent party strife.”³⁰³ Agesilaus apparently solved the political problems at Thespieae by forcing some sort of compromise. Unfortunately we do not know of the specific details but it probably was a type of power sharing arrangement. The settlement at Thespieae is unusual in that it did not include the exile or death of

³⁰¹ Xenophon 5.4.34.

³⁰² Diodorus 15.34.2. (Oldfather)

³⁰³ Xenophon 5.4.55. (Warner)

anyone. Tuplin argues that the strife was between two factions within the pro-Spartan camp.³⁰⁴ Thespian actions during throughout the next 5 years uphold Tuplin's argument. Thespieae remained firmly in the Spartan camp and hostile to Thebes. Perhaps the Theban aid given to the democrats in Boeotia did not include Thespieae as this city had a long history of hostility towards Thebes.

En route to Sparta, Agesilaus ruptured a vein in his leg. The injury was such that he was absent from Spartan affairs for nearly five years. With Agesilaus immobilized, Spartan internal politics suffered from misdirection. For all of Agesilaus' faults, he was a strong leader with a decisive policy. Cleombrotus, the other king despite leading a faction that opposed Agesilaus followed his imperialistic policies. Even without Agesilaus, his faction remained strong though they probably became less decisive in their actions. Over the next five Sparta generally followed Agesilaus-style imperialistic policies.

In 376, the war switched to the sea after an aborted attempt by Cleombrotus to invade Boeotia again. Xenophon suggests that Sparta agreed to shift the war to sea when the allies, tired of fighting fruitless campaigns against the Thebans pressured her for decisive action.³⁰⁵ The initiative to switch the war to sea probably came from Cleombrotus' faction. Though following Agesilaus policies, this faction may have had increased influence into the manner in which the imperialistic policies were carried out. By switching the war to sea, they may have hoped to bring the Athenians to the peace table and so extricate themselves honorably from a war rapidly turning against them.

³⁰⁴ Christopher Tuplin. *The failings of Empire a reading of Xenophon Hellenica 2.3.11-7.5.27* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1993) 128.

³⁰⁵ Xenophon 5.4.60.

Smith argues that the allies were the cause of the switch to sea. He suggests that they desired this, as warfare at sea was less taxing on the all important hoplite class.³⁰⁶ Smith is correct in that warfare at sea as opposed to war on land was less taxing on the hoplite class. Sparta may indeed have had this in mind when bringing the war to sea. Problematically, however, Sparta did not *switch* the war to sea; she merely opened up another theater. While Sparta may have had intentions to switch the war to sea, the land war against Thebes remained unresolved. We know the allies were called out to invade Boeotia in 376, though the invasion was aborted.³⁰⁷ In opening up the naval front, Sparta actually placed more demands on the allies who probably were forced to supply money for the naval campaign in addition to men for the land war.

This policy was inherently flawed: history had shown that Sparta could not defeat Athens at sea without significant Persian assistance, which was unavailable at the time. The Spartan fleet of 65 triremes, probably equipped by the allies, set out to blockade Athens. The Athenians responded by outfitting a fleet of 83 triremes under the command of Chabrias. The fleet intercepted the Spartans near Naxos and decisively defeated them. Chabrias captured or destroyed 34 triremes while losing only 18 of his own ships. At this point, Athens again became master of the seas. Sparta's plan seemed to be backfiring.

The Athenians followed up their success. They sent a fleet to harass the Peloponnese that according to Hamilton prevented a Spartan invasion of Boeotia in 375.³⁰⁸ The arrival of the Athenian fleet in the Ionian Sea won over Corcyra, Acarnania, and Cephalonia. Sparta again outfitted a fleet in a desperate attempt to stop the growing

³⁰⁶ Smith, "Opposition to Agesilaus" 286.

³⁰⁷ Xenophon 5.4.49.

³⁰⁸ Hamilton, Agesilaus 185.

Athenian power. The two fleets met near Alyzia and fought an indecisive battle. We do not know the specific casualty figures though in the aftermath of the battle, the Athenian fleet had grown to 70 triremes, which caused Xenophon to state that the Athenian fleet was “obviously greatly superior.”³⁰⁹ Just as occurred previously, the Spartans could not match the Athenians at sea, qualitatively or quantitatively. In fact, since the decision to switch the war to sea, Sparta had lost far more than they had gained.

In 375, Sparta suffered a disaster on land equal if not greater to her setbacks at sea. At some during the preceding 2 years, Sparta had deployed 2 morae to garrison Orchomenos. Upon hearing the Spartan garrison was away on an expedition to Lokris, Pelopidas launched an expedition from Thebes, hoping to capture the city. Arriving at Orchomenos, he was disappointed to learn that other troops from Sparta had replaced the garrison and marched his troops back to Thebes.³¹⁰³¹¹

While returning to Thebes, Pelopidas encountered the two Sparta morae returning from Lokris. The Spartans blocked the path of the Thebans near a place called Tegyra. Despite the Spartans having more than 1,000 men to his 300, Pelopidas decided to attack. Pelopidas’ 300 men were the famous Sacred Band of Thebes. These men were far superior to the regular Theban hoplites. According to Plutarch they lived in barracks and were supported at the cities expense.³¹² They were full time soldiers in every sense, the equal to any Spartiate. More importantly, the sacred band consisted of 150 homosexual couples whose devotion for each other increased the fighting prowess of the unit.

³⁰⁹ Xenophon 5.4.66.

³¹⁰ Hamilton, Agesilaus 186.

³¹¹ Plutarch Pelopidas 15.

³¹² Plutarch Pelopidas 18.

When he encountered the Spartans, Pelopidas drew up his troops in a dense formation and charged. His men pushed the Spartans back, killing both polemarchs in the process. Seeing what was occurring and in hopes of avoiding further casualties, the Spartans tried to open up a lane by which the Thebans might pass through to return home. Pelopidas took advantage of this but not as the Spartans had hoped. He charged his men into the gap but did not pass through the Spartan lines and instead attacked the Spartans in their unprotected flanks. The flank attack wrecked utter havoc on the Spartans who broke off and fled for the safety of Orchomenos.³¹³

What exactly happened at Tegyra? Plutarch whose account is most detailed ascribes the Theban victory to the superiority of Pelopidas' generalship and the dense formation. Yet the Thebans were outnumbered by more than 3 to 1. In hoplite battles such odds could only be overcome if the men were markedly superior in quality. The disparity needed to overcome such odds, it is doubtful even the Spartiates could provide on a regular basis. The men of the sacred band were certainly not overwhelmingly superior to the Spartiates. To further understand the events at Tegyra we must return to the battle of Olynthus in 381.

At that battle, the Periokic hoplite class was entirely destroyed. These were men with significant experience fighting as equals to the Spartiates in the morae. Sparta essentially had to start from scratch to reequip their morae. To keep the mora at strength of around 500, Sparta could not rely on a yearly recruitment of Perioikoi in ratio to the graduating class of the agoge, as this ratio would not be great enough to bring the mora back up to strength.

³¹³ Plutarch Pelopidas 18.

We hear from Diodorus that in 378, Agesilaus had with him 5 Spartan regiments (more likely 4) of around 500 men each. So clearly the Spartans had in two years brought the morae to around full strength. This only could have been done through massive recruitment. Recruitment of Perioikoi to the mora, which previously had almost certainly been a very selective process, now had to be thrown open. The Perioikoi who served were no longer of the highest quality. In fact it was probably worse than that for the Spartans, who probably were forced to recruit many undesirable Perioikoi just to keep their morae near full strength.

Further making perioikic recruitment difficult was the naval war. Figueira argues that the manpower needed to serve in the Spartan fleet mostly came from the Perioikoi.³¹⁴ There were not enough Perioikoi of martial caliber to sustain the army and navy. Suddenly, both service branches had great demand for a limited supply of martially inclined men

Based on the composition of the Spartan morae in 375, it is easy to see how 300 men outnumbered three to one defeated two Spartan morae. Figueira suggests that Spartan morae in 375 were around 60% Perioikoi, many of whom were certainly well inferior to the Spartiates.³¹⁵

In 375 in the aftermath of the defeat at Tegyra and the disastrous naval campaign, Sparta came to the peace table. Xenophon unsurprisingly suggests that the peace was an Athenian initiative as they were exhausted from the war. He leaves out entirely the Spartan sentiment, acknowledging only that the two sides agreed on peace. Xenophon

³¹⁴ Figueira, "Population Patterns" 190.

³¹⁵ Figueira, "Population Patterns" 212.

also ignores the Theban role in the peace, an omission probably the result of his anti-Theban feelings.³¹⁶

Diodorus has a different version of events. He suggests that the peace initiative came from Artaxerxes who needed mercenaries for his war in Egypt.³¹⁷ Hamilton notes that the Diodorus' account does not necessarily run counter to Xenophon as the Athenian ambassadors may have gone to Sparta as part of a Greek wide peace conference.³¹⁸

The peace of 375 was similar to the peace of Antalkidas in that it guaranteed autonomy for all Greek states. It also contained a clause forbidding foreign garrisons. While the Athenian and Spartan motives for making peace are clear, there remain uncertainties regarding the Thebans. The key stumbling block according to Diodorus was the issue of Boeotia. Cartledge notes that by the peace of 375, Thebes had essentially restored much of the old Boeotian federation. According to Diodorus, the Thebans would only sign the peace if they could do so for all of Boeotia. Both Athens and Sparta opposed this.³¹⁹ Hamilton believes that Diodorus may be confusing the events of the peace of 375 with a peace conference in 371.³²⁰ In the latter event, the Theban leader Epaminondas spoke on behalf of Theban claims to represent all of Boeotia. In Diodorus' next chapter (39), he seems to jump from the timeline to mention the battle of Leuctra, then in chapter 40, returns to the events of 375. Though Diodorus does acknowledge that chapter 40 was a diversion from the narrative, his association between Epaminondas' speech and the battle of Leuctra certainly lends credence to Hamilton's hypothesis that he confused the events of 375 with those of 371.

³¹⁶ Xenophon 6.2.1.

³¹⁷ Diodorus 15.38.1.

³¹⁸ Hamilton, Agesilaus 191.

³¹⁹ Diodorus 15.28.3.

³²⁰ Hamilton, Agesilaus 191.

We know that Athens and Sparta agreed to the peace in 375 but it is unclear if the Thebans gave in to Athenian pressure to not sign for Boeotia. Diodorus states that they did not sign the peace but as noted above his timeline is questionable. Hamilton argues that Thebes probably acquiesced to the Athenian demands.³²¹ That there was indeed no warfare between Sparta and Thebes until 371 is significant evidence that Thebes did sign on to the peace of 375. Roos also agrees with Hamilton that the Thebans signed the peace believing that Xenophon in choosing to mention only Athens and Sparta actually meant Athens, Sparta, as well as each of their respective allies, which included the Thebans.³²²

Since the evidence points to the Thebans signing the peace treaty of 375, we must ask why they did so when they refused to sign the exact same peace four years later. The Thebans in 375 were probably still in the process of building up their army and did not yet consider themselves strong enough to challenge the Spartans without Athenian help. Further, if they did not agree to the peace, the rest of Greece might see them as aggressors. The Thebans also might have held enough sway over the other Boeotian cities that they considered the Boeotian Federation already de facto reestablished. We know that democratic anti-Spartan parties were in power in many of the Boeotian cities.³²³ The Thebans may have intended to wait until the opportunity presented itself to gain de jure recognition of the Boeotian Federation.

The peace of 375 had a clause calling for the return of exiles. Diodorus reports that this caused tremendous upheaval particularly in the Peloponnese as exiled democrats returned to their cities and desired to change the constitutions.³²⁴ Diodorus' account,

³²¹ Hamilton, Agesilaus 192.

³²² A. G. Roos. "The Peace of Sparta of 374 B.C." *Mnemosyne* Fourth Series, Vol. 2, Fasc. 4 (1949), 268.

³²³ Buckler, *The Theban Hegemony*, 21.

³²⁴ Diodorus 15.40. 1-5.

which Hamilton sees no reason to doubt, gives insight into Spartan military capabilities.³²⁵ That Sparta would be willing to allow the return of the exiles to the Peloponnesian cities was a major victory for the Athenians and suggests that Sparta was unable to continue the war. Further, we hear of no Spartan interventions in the Peloponnesian stasis, which is highly unusual. One possible explanation, that Cleombrotus' anti-intervention faction had become dominant at Sparta is doubtful as Sparta *did* intervene in the strife at Corcyra. The best explanation is that Sparta was simply unable to act, even in the Peloponnese without significant allied assistance. As long as many of her allies were engaged in civil war, they could not contribute to any expedition either monetarily or with manpower.

In 374, Sparta intervened in the strife at Corcyra. Perhaps the Spartans felt they had to intervene somewhere and only in Corcyra did they have the means to do so. Corcyra was largely a maritime power and lacked a large hoplite army. We know from Xenophon that Sparta recruited only 1,500 mercenaries in an attempt to subdue Corcyra. Further speaking to the desperate manpower situation is that there were Spartan troops present. Sparta traditionally would avoid at all costs sending Spartiates for expeditionary warfare.

The Spartans initially succeeded in besieging Corcyra. Soon, however a small Athenian relief force arrived and emboldened the Corcyrans who launched an attack against the Spartan besiegers and shockingly defeated them killing their leader Mnasippus. After this defeat, the Spartan boarded their ships and sailed off leaving Corcyra to the Athenians.³²⁶

³²⁵ Hamilton, Agesilaus 192.

³²⁶ Xenophon 5.4.65.

Thebes being a part of the Athenian alliance probably saw that since Athens and Sparta were at war, the peace of 375 was essentially broken. The Thebans took the opportunity to expand the Boeotian Federation. They ravaged Thespian territory and seem to have forced the Thespians to rejoin the Boeotian Federation. The Thebans launched an assault against Plataea and destroyed that city in 373.³²⁷

In 371, Athens and Sparta were again exhausted from war and eager for peace. Another peace conference was held again at the behest of Artaxerxes, who again needed mercenaries. This peace was essentially a renewal of the peace of 375, though with a new clause: any state that did not sign the peace or adhere to the peace was subject to war by a coalition of the signatories.³²⁸

The speeches given at the peace conference by the Athenians were generally conciliatory towards the Spartans and somewhat hostile towards the Thebans.³²⁹ The Athenians especially condemned the Theban actions towards Plataea and Thespieae. Buckler states that the peace conference of 371 laid out the basis for Athens and Sparta to agree to a dual hegemony.³³⁰ Both poleis would have had reason to do so. First and foremost they could not continue to fight proxy wars through their partisans. The cost was too great financially to Athens and in terms of manpower for Sparta. Further both poleis were concerned with the rise of Thebes. That polis was now in command of an enlarged and fully formed Boeotian Federation and a major power in central Greece bordering both Attica and the Peloponnese. Neither Athens nor Sparta wished for such a geopolitical disposition. The two major poleis seem to have agreed to some sort of

³²⁷ Diodorus 15.46.4.

³²⁸ Xenophon 6.3.6.

³²⁹ Xenophon 5.3.1-18.

³³⁰ Buckler, *The Theban Hegemony* 51.

détente that would later become a full fledged alliance.³³¹ As often happened in Greece, poleis would put aside their differences and join together against a greater threat.

According to Xenophon, the Thebans initially agreed to the peace terms but the next day Epaminondas, the Theban representative, told a recently recovered Agesilaus that Thebes wished to change her signature to Boeotia. Agesilaus refused to allow this and told Epaminondas that if Thebes was opposed to the peace, he would strike them from it. On Theban instructions, they were excluded from the peace.³³²

Why the sudden change in Theban attitudes? In Plutarch's account we hear a slightly different version of events. Plutarch relates an argument between the Spartan king and Epaminondas taking place in front of the ambassadors. The Theban when called to task about the issue of Thebes leaving the Boeotian cities independent simply replied by asking Agesilaus the exact same question about the lack of independence for the Laconian cities. Agesilaus then became enraged and demanded if Epaminondas truly intended for the cities of Boeotia to remain independent of Thebes. Epaminondas responded again with his earlier question asking Agesilaus the same question of the Laconian Cities. Agesilaus, now completely irate, took the opportunity to strike Thebes from the peace.³³³

Plutarch's story may be the explanation as to why the Thebans name was crossed out. It is possible that Plutarch's timeline was slightly confused and peace had already been made though there were still certain aspects of the treaty that needed to be hammered out or the ambassadors took the opportunity of the peace conference to handle other diplomatic business. Agesilaus may have challenged Epaminondas to get a public

³³¹ Cartledge, Agesilaos 309.

³³² Xenophon 6.3.20.

³³³ Plutarch Agesilaus 28.

guarantee that he would not try to reform the Boeotian Federation, as the treaty was not explicit enough.

Epaminondas seems to have taken pleasure in the exchange and clearly baited Agesilaus. From what we know of Epaminondas he was a political and military genius who had supreme confidence in himself. His goal might have been to rile up Agesilaus into declaring war on him. Epaminondas almost certainly knew the Spartan military situation was desperate and that his Theban troops could defeat them. He just needed an opportunity to draw a Spartan army into Boeotian territory.

Agesilaus' reaction is rather unsurprising. His hatred for Thebes is well attested. Again, we see his aggressive personality. This trait was probably brought out because he was not only challenged but also clearly outwitted. Expecting obedience, he quickly became frustrated and then enraged. Even after he had cooled off, Agesilaus still was focused, probably obsessively, on defeating Thebes. This attitude was almost certainly exactly what Epaminondas wished for.

Sometime prior to the peace of 371, Sparta had moved her army of Spartiates and allies into Phocis. Hamilton suggests this movement was to protect Phocis in response to Theban aggression.³³⁴ At the end of Diodorus' chapter on the breakdown of the peace conference he mentions the Spartans preparing for war by "levying armies both of their own citizens and from their allies."³³⁵ We know from Xenophon that the army was already in place at the end of the peace conference.³³⁶ Diodorus as he often does may have the event correct but the timing off. We know that the peace conference was Agesilaus' return to duty and it is likely that he had only recently recovered fully. He

³³⁴ Hamilton, Agesilaus 203.

³³⁵ Xenophon 6.4.2.

³³⁶ Diodorus 15.50.6.

may have desired to pick up where he left off in 377, with an invasion of Thebes. Diodorus' assertion of the levy almost certainly occurred prior to the peace conference and at the behest of the recently recovered Agesilaus. In order to make sure Thebes would sign a peace treaty, Agesilaus may have thought it wise to have an army in Boeotia to pressure the Thebans into doing so. Due to his condition, however, Agesilaus probably was unable to command the army and so left the task to Cleombrotus. The junior king had probably gathered the army and marched to Phocis but paused upon the opening of the peace conference.

On Agesilaus order, the army marched on Thebes. This set the stage for a decisive confrontation between Sparta and Thebes. Plutarch describes the Spartan offensive as “begun out of ill temper rather than any definite plan.”³³⁷ He further asserts that there was much opposition amongst the allies who were almost certainly tired of unnecessary campaigning in Boeotia. There was even opposition to the campaign in Sparta itself. The reluctance for going to war was so great even Xenophon acknowledged it. He relays that story of a Spartan named Prothoos who suggested that Sparta withdraw from Phocis and then demand Thebes leave the Boeotian cities independent. If the Thebans refused at this point, Sparta would have justification in going to war.³³⁸

Prothoos worry about the discontent of the allies war suggests his plan would be superior, as only those poleis committed to the independence of Boeotia would send troops. Prothoos makes clear that there was little cause for war at the moment. The allies probably saw the campaign as another example of Spartan aggression towards Thebes. If the armies were called up voluntarily to fight for the principle of independence for other

³³⁷ Plutarch Pelopidas 28. (Stewart and Long)

³³⁸ Xenophon 6.4.2.

Greeks, a popular concept, surely the troop contributions would be greater in both quantity and quality.

Initially, there was doubt if the Thebans would even fight. The 6 Boeotarchs were split 3-3 on whether or not to fight. Only when the seventh Boeotarch arrived with reinforcements, and the deciding vote, did the Thebans commit to battle.³³⁹

Hamilton, Cartledge, and Buckler agree that the Theban army was numerically inferior to the Peloponnesian league army.³⁴⁰ Hamilton suggests 7,000 Boeotians of which 4,000 were Theban against 10,000 infantry and 1,000 cavalry.³⁴¹ Hamilton suggests the Theban contingent and Spartan contingent were evenly matched numerically. Cartledge agrees with Hamilton though he acknowledges that the Spartan contingent *could* have been smaller than the Theban contingent.³⁴² In fact, the Theban contingent was almost certainly superior numerically. We know from Xenophon that there were four morae and 700 Spartiates at Leuctra. The mora at Leuctra almost certainly remained at around 500 men, as was the composition in 378. Four morae plus the 300 hippies would only equate to around 2,300 men. This number however fits in well with the general Spartan contribution to the entire Peloponnesian league army. For the Boeotian war in 378, the Spartans contributed roughly 3,000 hoplites to the 18,000-infantry force or 16%. In 371 the Spartan contribution of roughly 2,300 hoplites would be 23% of the entire army, the 7% increase explainable by allied defections and battlefield losses. If there were indeed 4,000 Thebans as Hamilton, and Cartledge suggest, then the

³³⁹ Buckler, *The Theban Hegemony* 62.

³⁴⁰ Hamilton, *Agésilas* 204. Cartledge, *Agésilas* 238. Buckler, *The Theban Hegemony* 63.

³⁴¹ Plutarch *Pelopidas* 20.

³⁴² Cartledge *Agésilas* 238.

Theban contingent probably enjoyed a numerical advantage possibly as great as two to one over their Spartan adversaries

Most scholars suggest that at Leuctra Epaminondas employed a revolutionary battle tactic: deepening the Thebans phalanx to 50 shields, arranging his troops in an oblique formation, and attacking the Spartans on the right with his best troops. Yet according to Hansen, these tactics were neither revolutionary nor decisive.³⁴³ Hansen sights numerous examples throughout Greek military history of these battle tactics being used and that they in fact offered little advantage. Yet Hansen as well as Cartledge, Buckler, and Hamilton while acknowledging the depth of the Theban heavy column overlook the effect a potential Theban numerical advantage might have. Traditionally, the opposing forces across the battle lines would be relatively even numerically.

Epaminondas' "revolutionary tactic" probably was not the depth of his column but the concentration of numbers. Similar to the modern concept of the armored spearhead where by concentrating all armor at the same point, an attacking army even if it is numerically inferior can achieve a strong numerical superiority in one sector to break the enemy line. Perhaps Epaminondas had this in mind. His column would break the Spartan line before the Spartan allies broke his allied line. Such a plan carried great risk: the roughly 3,000 Theban allies in the center and right of the line were outnumbered at least two to one/

The battle commenced with the usual cavalry skirmishing of which the superior Theban cavalry had the better. The cavalry however would play no further role. The heavy Theban phalanx then began to advance. Cleombrotus attempted to extend his line in order to outflank the massed Theban column. Before he could complete this maneuver,

³⁴³ Victor Hanson "Epaminondas, the Battle of Leuctra (371 B.C.), and the "Revolution" in Greek Battle Tactics" *Classical Antiquity* Vol. 7, No. 2 (Oct., 1988), 199.

Pelopidas charged into the Spartan lines at the head of the sacred band. Plutarch, who provides the only narrative on the role of the sacred band writes that even the Spartans, accustomed to fighting and maneuvering at the same time, could not hold their ground when both the sacred band and Epaminondas massed column were bearing down upon them.³⁴⁴ According to Xenophon however, the Spartans did stand their ground and continued to do so even after their king was killed in the fighting.³⁴⁵ Xenophon states that the Spartan only withdrew once Dinon the polemarch along with Sphodrias and Cleonymus were killed. Essentially, Xenophon argues that the troops withdrew once there was a breakdown in command. Diodorus' narrative also agrees with Xenophon as to the specific cause of defeat.³⁴⁶

The Theban victory over the Spartan contingent is actually not that surprising upon further analysis of the composition of the Spartan morae who fought at Leuctra. We know from Xenophon that there were 4 morae and a total of 700 Spartiates present. This number almost certainly includes the 300 hippies. Therefore, there were probably only 400 Spartiates total and 100 in each of the four morae. That would leave the remainder of the mora to be made up of Perioikoi. As noted previously, the Spartans had to lean so heavily on the Perioikoi just to bring the mora up to 500 that they undoubtedly were forced to recruit many who were unsuitable for the rigors of service with the Spartiates. The inability of Cleombrotus to complete his maneuver may be explained by the poor quality of his troops. Against 4,000 Thebans and 300 men of the sacred band, the Spartan effort is remarkable. The key to the Theban victory over the Spartan contingent was

³⁴⁴ Plutarch Pelopidas 23.

³⁴⁵ Xenophon 6.4.14.

³⁴⁶ Diodorus 15.56.1-4.

probably due just as much to their numerical superiority as to the overall qualitative inferiority of the Spartan morae.

While the main contest for supremacy was occurring on the Spartan right, it is doubtful that the left did not engage. Munn states that the Theban allies were equally as unwilling as the Spartan allies.³⁴⁷ Yet Pausanias directly contradicts this notion. He states that Epaminondas was fearful of some of the allies particularly the Thespians fleeing in the midst of the battle and allowed any contingent that did not wish to fight to leave.³⁴⁸ Only the Thespians took him up on the offer.³⁴⁹ The Theban allies who stayed were certainly committed to the fight.

What occurred on the Spartan left? Pausanias states contrary to many modern perceptions that the allies did fight but quickly gave ground, as they were not committed to battle.³⁵⁰ Besides Pausanias, only Diodorus also acknowledges an allied role in the battle. He writes that the Lacedaemonian force charged on both wings.³⁵¹ Diodorus, however, disagrees with Pausanias on which side gave ground suggesting that the Theban allies were the ones to withdraw, albeit gradually and as part of Epaminondas' battle plan.³⁵² As Hansen notes, a gradual fighting withdrawal was a complex tactic unlikely to be performed by the Thebans let alone their allies.³⁵³

As noted above, our ancient sources except for the brief mention of retreat are silent on the topic. Modern scholars have almost myopically focused their analyses of Leuctra to the action on the Spartan right. We know from Xenophon that *after* the battle

³⁴⁷ Munn, "Thebes and Central Greece" 84.

³⁴⁸ Pausanias Description of Greece, trans W.H.S. Jones. The Loeb Classical Library Pausanias Volume IV. Cambridge: Harvard 1935. 9.13.8.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Pausanias 9.13.8.

³⁵¹ Diodorus 15.55.3.

³⁵² Diodorus 15.55.3.

³⁵³ Hansen "Epaminondas" 199.

the allies all but refused to continue fighting. Most indications that the allies did indeed play a substantial role in the battle come from Pausanias, who, states that after the battle, Epaminondas, on order to show how many Spartiates were lost, ordered the allies to collect their dead first. Clearly there were allied casualties, proving a clash on the left wing. Xenophon's statement regarding the allied aversion to fighting does not contradict Pausanias. Xenophon may as he often does, choose to leave out the allied role.

Xenophon's silence may be indicative that the allies had fought but done so poorly that he felt mentioning their performance would be an embarrassment for Sparta. If the allies did immediately turn and run as Pausanias suggests, Xenophon would have ample reason to sight them for cowardice and blame them for the defeat.

3,000 hoplites of average quality could not hold off 8,000 of average quality. So why did the Spartan allies fail to break through? Perhaps not all 8,000 hoplites engaged with full energy. There may have only been a small number who were truly committed to the battle. The rest of the "less committed" allies may have marched out slowly against the Theban allies waiting to see the outcome of the main clash. Epaminondas' formation may have incidentally furthered the ambivalence of the allies' attack. In Epaminondas' formation, the Theban rightwing was located well behind the leftwing. As a result, the Spartan allies facing the Theban right would have had a much further distance to march before the clash. It may have been during this march that some of the already disheartened allies saw the massed Thebans bearing down upon the Spartan contingent and thinking a Spartan defeat forthcoming saw no need to further participate and withdrew. Only the most committed Spartan allies along with the mercenaries arrived at the Theban line where they were unable to achieve a breakthrough.

The allied withdrawal probably played a significant role in the battle. Had they stayed and taken advantage of their superior numbers, they would have almost certainly routed the Theban allies and controlled the entire left side (from a Spartan perspective) of the battlefield. This in turn could have threatened both the Theban camp and more importantly Epaminondas exposed right flank, which almost certainly would have forced him to break of the attack and greatly changed the geopolitical landscape. The allies however did retreat and the Thebans dealt the Spartans a crushing defeat.

The Theban victory at Leuctra was incredible if only for morale. The Spartans were perceived to be invincible. This invincibility myth helped hold together the Spartan alliances and made other poleis loathe to challenge her. At Leuctra, Sparta had lost 400 Spartiates or nearly half the citizen population and lacked the manpower capability to continue to embark on expansionist policies.³⁵⁴ The significance of the allied withdrawal cannot be understated. Sparta had mistreated her allies for years, and yet still expected them to fight well in campaigns they were ideologically opposed to.

³⁵⁴ Xenophon 6.4.15.

Chapter 9

Throughout history there are many examples of a single battle deciding the outcome of a war and changing the geopolitical map. Rarely however are they as shocking as Leuctra. The Spartans in 371 had for as long as Greeks could remember been unbeatable. Such a lengthy invincibility myth may only be found in the dominance of the Royal Navy during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Had the British lost either at Trafalgar in 1805 or Jutland in 1915, the shock and upheaval might have been similar to what occurred after Leuctra.

Any doubt that Leuctra did not shatter the Spartan hegemony was quickly erased. Epaminondas led successive invasions of the Peloponnese. The invading armies consisted of over 70,000 men, quite possibly the largest mainland Greece had ever seen. This army consisted of many disheartened former allies of Sparta who eagerly switched their allegiance. In addition to losing the Peloponnesian league, Sparta lost control of Messenia and its many helots that formed the lifeblood of the economy.

Though Leuctra broke the Spartan hegemony, the groundwork for the defeat was laid years earlier. Population decline, probably the result of several factors, was at no point accounted for by the Spartans. Only Lysander seemed to be aware that the Spartan system was inherently incompatible with empire. He believed that a complete change in Spartan domestic policy was necessary in order for Sparta to embark on an imperialistic foreign policy. Lysander's proposals were too radical for the conservative kings who wished to maintain their absolute dominance and prevent foreign policy adventurism.

Then Agesilaus came to the throne. He took aspects of Lysander's foreign policy and traditional domestic policy together for negative consequences.

Rather than realize that their population was shrinking and tailor foreign policy to this, the Spartans under Agesilaus did just the opposite. They embarked on foreign policy adventures, yet wished to maintain the domestic status quo. These imperial pursuits, which had little gain either in the short or long term, served only to further reduce manpower.

Additional manpower for Sparta came from willing allies in the Peloponnesian League. Agesilaus seemed however to disregard traditional practices and called out the allies year after year for non-vital campaigns. Especially egregious, the Peloponnesians were expected to fight against poleis they regarded as their own allies.

Agesilaus continued to create enemies unnecessarily. He blatantly imposed a tyranny on Thebes, which could not be maintained. Then he shockingly entered into a war with Athens for seemingly no purpose. Fighting both wars at the same time took their toll on Sparta. She could not keep up with the manpower demands of the land war and the financial demands of the war at sea and would lose them both. In spite of all this, Agesilaus still could not accept reality and refused to accept a Theban led Boeotian federation. He impetuously ordered an army weakened by years of attrition and full of disenchanting allies to attack the Thebans who soundly defeated them.

We must acknowledge population decline as a means by which Sparta lost her hegemony. It was however the inability to craft foreign policy to this reality that ultimately led to Sparta's downfall. In 386 following the peace of Antalkidas, Sparta had achieved hegemony in Greece. Yet that was not enough for Agesilaus. It is fair to wonder

if Agesilaus may have succumbed to an insatiable appetite for conquest. This same appetite has driven empires to ruin.

There are lessons to be learned from the decline of the Spartan hegemony. Policy must be crafted to acknowledge domestic realities. Had Sparta fully accounted for population decline it is doubtful that she would have embarked on such a foolish foreign policy. Most important however is not to underestimate the importance of popular opinion. Sparta disregarded this and it led to her demise. Perhaps modern policy makers ought to study this period, as any insights they might gain from Xenophon, Diodorus, Pausanias, and Plutarch could be invaluable.

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